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SIR TRISTRAM'S WILL.

VOL. I.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1907

SIR TRISTRAM'S WILL.

BY

ALICE KING,

AUTHOR OF

"EVELINE," "FOREST KEEP,"

&c. &c.

"The Spiritual dissolves itself into Reality, and Reality passes over into the Spiritual."

From the Danish of Andersen.

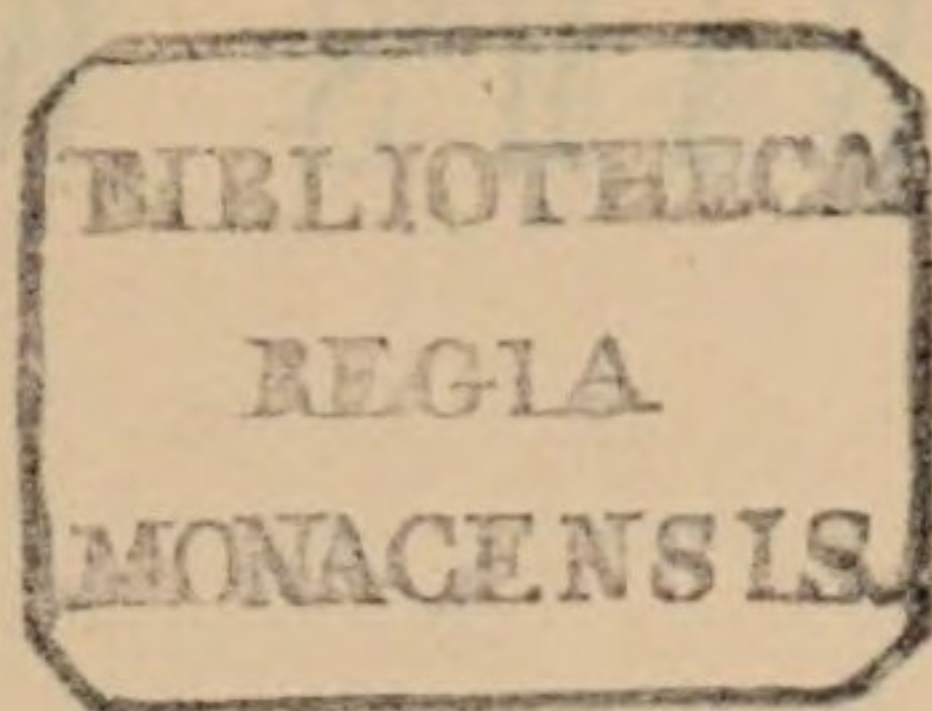
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO
CHARLES DICKENS, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

To all who can appreciate Genius, and who recognise in Imagination the highest and most graceful faculty of the human mind, your writings have long been an object of admiration; but it is only the few who are aware of the one great difficulty under which I write, who know the generous kindness which bids me thus publicly acknowledge myself

Most gratefully and respectfully yours,

A L I C E K I N G.

Cutcombe Vicarage.

“Admiratione te potius quam temporalibus laudibus, et, si natura suppeditet, imitatione decoremus.”

TACITUS—*Vita Agricolaë.*

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CHAPTER I.

NOT far from the western coast of North Wales, and near to some of the wildest country of that most beautiful part of our island, there stands in a small valley a stately old manorial mansion. This valley is soft and bright, in the midst of scenery remarkable for barren grandeur. Rich meadows surround the wide, undulating deer park, adorned with tufts of feathery trees, which, as seen in the sunshine from the heights above, with the shifting light and shade upon their foliage, one might fancy to be plumes dropped from the wing of some giant bird, such as in the world's infancy

soared perhaps over her primeval forests.

The verdure of this gaily-tinted valley was caused partly by the shelter of the high hills that rose on either side of it, and partly by a little stream which warbled and danced along to the tinkling of its own jubilant music.

Llanmorden House stood at the western end of the valley, where it opened towards the sea. The deer park stretched away to the east on the other side, and between the house and the sea was about half a mile of rather barren land. Parts of the building dated from a very remote period. You might find in it an example of nearly every style of architecture which has prevailed in England for the last four hundred years.

The family of the Mordens, to whom it belongs, is one of the most ancient in Wales, and the house forms as it were a substantial record of their history. There may be seen

the round tower from which stout old Owen Morden, in the days of the last Welsh king, hurled an English baron who was about to plant the British standard on the wall, and cast after him a volley of Welsh oaths, which did not hurt him so much as the pavement on which he fell. There is the postern door by which, in the troublous times of the Wars of the Roses, the Great Queen Margaret herself is said to have entered, with her little son Prince Edward in her hand, when the power of York, pressing hard upon her, forced her to take refuge in these Western solitudes.

Close by is the chapel, with the rude stone crucifix still standing over the altar where high mass—for the Mordons adhered to the old faith long after the Reformation—was celebrated in defiance of the Virgin Queen herself. In this room a prince of the blood royal once slept; and from that window a

fair daughter of the house, of whose beauty history says more than it does of her worth, escaped from the guardianship of her tyrannical father, to reach the arms, so tradition relates, of no less a personage than the great Duke of Buckingham, who had become enamoured of her, and had won her heart the year before at a court ball.

But while the Mordens have religiously preserved these memorials of their ancient lineage and importance, they have also understood how to live in this comfortable age.

About the beginning of the present century, Sir Stephen, the then baronet, employed a part of his magnificent income—for the family is not only one of the oldest but also one of the wealthiest in Wales—in adding to the house a spacious and commodious wing. And although this has produced, in an architectural sense, an incongruous effect, it

has made the hall a far more agreeable residence to modern taste and love of comfort, than it would otherwise have been.

Scarcely anywhere could a young English gentleman have found a more agreeable place in which to indulge his love of ease and idleness than Llanmorden House. There were two spacious, handsomely-furnished drawing-rooms, for the ladies or visitors of the house; a billiard-room, in which a morning would slip away very pleasantly; a smoking-room; a gallery containing some pictures in which even connoisseurs in art might feel an interest. Besides these there was a cabinet of curiosities, containing a variety of specimens of different classes, from the battle-axe of some ancient chieftain of the family, to an autograph letter from the poet Spenser to one of its members, himself of a literary turn, who had conversed with Sydney, and exchanged

passes of wit with rare Ben Jonson. If a visitor desired a spice of romance, he had but to pass into the older part of the building, and he would find himself in the midst of a world of spectral traditions. There were no less than half a dozen ghosts reputed to frequent this portion of the house. In the first place, there was a shadowy lady in grey silk, who was perpetually rustling up and down between the hours of twelve and one. She was followed by a grim old baron in full armour, whose head having been struck from his shoulders by bluff King Hal in one of his fits of ill-humour—nobody remembers for what—had been stuck on so badly in the other world that one could see the red mark round his neck.

Then there was a monk who had an incurable propensity for rising from his grave among the neighbouring ruins of an old

abbey, on the seventh day of every month, to come and wander about here.

But though inside the house was thus haunted by memories of the past, outside there were no traces left of these, save in the weather-stained stones of the old walls. A bright garden spread its variegated mosaic of flowers where the deep, dark waters of the moat had once stagnated, and given chivalry its fevers, and sleek deer browsed peacefully where the invading English archers once had been encamped. Instead of the band of armed troopers who in olden days often drew near the stronghold of the Mordens, bent on deeds of destruction, there now rolled in on it the carriage of the tourist, filled with ladies in broad-brimmed straw hats, who, as they drove along the public road through the park, sweetened upon their lips the guide-book platitudes about the lights and shadows

among the beech-trees, or went off into architectural rhapsodies concerning the window in the east end of the chapel.

On the west side of the house was a broad terrace walk, where, as you loitered up and down on summer evenings, you could listen to the distant dash and murmur of the waves, and inhale the sweet breath of the honeysuckle and jasmine which clambered about the walls.

As the Mordens owned the greater part of the country for several miles round, and enjoyed an income of full twenty thousand a year, they had the worship of their neighbours, of course, for another out-door luxury.

At the time of this story the master of the mansion was Sir Edward Morden, a man of between thirty and forty years of age. When he was about twelve years old, Sir Edward had been left, by the death of

his father—whose only child he was—the sole heir to the estate and fortune of his ancestors, and he had grown up to the tune of all that plashing, murmuring, and licking of the social sea, that usually lulls men in his position. His youth had been spent partly at Llanmorden, with an unmarried sister of his father, who was his only surviving near relation, and who, for her part, idolized him, and gave him his own way, with all a woman's fondness. Partly he had been trained at Eton, where his peculiarly amiable and generous disposition made him a universal favourite.

Edward Morden was one of those who seem destined, wherever they go, to excite an honest sort of affectionate worship. His school companions cared nothing about his worldly wealth, and yet, without exactly knowing why, they all made much of him, yielded their wills to his, and thus in-

creased the cloud of incense with which he was being suffocated.

The consequence of his living in this atmosphere of homage had been, naturally enough, to give him an idea that it was the use and business of things in general to yield before him. Fortunately, his peculiarly good disposition and sweetness of temper prevented him from manifesting this feeling with any degree of overbearing arrogance; still, there was about him a dignity, nay, at times almost a haughtiness, which made one feel not in the least surprised at his taking, as a matter of course, the first place in everything. He was very far from being regarded as a cold, proud man, and his tenants and dependents treated him with a deep yet loving respect, that amounted almost to devotion.

Though endowed with abilities of a very high order, he had, partly from a desultory

course of reading, in which he had indulged in his boyhood, and partly from something of indolence which was inherent in his character, distinguished himself but little in his school-days. He blended the study of Dante and Shakspeare with that of Homer and Virgil; and he was more noted among his companions for the spirited lines which he would at times dash off, and for his elegant English composition, than for the accuracy of his Latin verses. On going to Oxford, however, he strove more to concentrate his power, and took rather high honours. This success raised the hope of his friends for his future, and they anticipated for him a brilliant career in public life. But their expectations concerning him in that respect were doomed to disappointment.

On leaving college, Sir Edward went to Italy, and this journey decided in a

great measure his future course. In that land of seductive beauty, where the air itself seems to woo us to a life of ease and indolence, where the very spirit of the arts hovers over everything, from "the purple top of Apennine," to the marble crypts under the churches, the desultory tastes of his boyhood again revived. With all the readiness and all the enthusiasm of youth, he gave himself up to the delicious influence of that sweet clime, and passed there two or three years in luxurious repose. At Rome he became acquainted with all the most eminent painters and sculptors of the day, as well as with many other men of talent; and the communion he held with these contributed in no small degree to form his character.

At length the young Englishman returned to his country; not, however, as his ambitious friends had hoped, to enter

upon public life, with all its weary struggles, its frequent disappointments, and its hard-won successes, but to the refinement of intellectual ease. His time was partly spent in London, where his spacious saloons were crowded with all that is most brilliant in the world of art and letters; and partly at his own ancestral home, where he delighted to gather men of genius around him. Llanmorden now became almost classic ground, from the number of great men which it received within its walls. There was a beech-tree in the park, under which the Laureate himself had once sat; and the graceful wit of him who sang of ancient Rome had often shot in playful flashes across the dining-table.

As for Sir Edward Morden, to do him justice, he by no means indulged his intellectual tastes and spent his ample fortune merely for his own gratification. More

than one poor artist was there who, when the cold hand of poverty was pressing hardest upon him, had been saved from despair by the generous baronet, who, discovering neglected worth, had added personal encouragement to the purchase of a picture. More than one man of talent was there who, when the light of hope was at length extinguished which had so long brightened the cheerless home in which he carried on his hard daily struggle for bread, was saved from ruin by his hand.

Very seldom could one visit his house without finding two or three of these distressed men of intellect among his guests; and he liked nothing better than to be first in recognizing unappreciated genius, and helping it to the success it merited. As may well be supposed, the gratitude, and not unfrequently the real affection, manifested towards him by these his *protégés* strengthened

his habit of a calm assumption of superiority.

Sir Edward was still a bachelor, though just now report said that he was not much longer to remain so. The honours of his house were at present done by his father's unmarried sister, Miss Olivia Morden, more familiarly known as Aunt Livie. She was a good-humoured, smartly-dressed lady, who, with a fair share of wits, had her foibles.

The month of March was drawing to a close. It was a spring, but a very chill spring evening. Winter seemed to have got his clutch once more on bright young awakening nature, and to be endeavouring to conjure her back again with his icy spells into the frozen slumber in which she had lain for so many months, till (like the sleeping princess) she should be roused by the first warm kisses of her brilliant prince the

sun. A thick sleet had been constantly driving from the north all the afternoon, and the neighbouring mountains wore once more their glistening white coronets. To the westward the ocean spread itself out in one wide grey plain, that heaved uneasily beneath the wind with a deep sighing sound.

Between eight and nine o'clock on the evening in question, a carriage drove rapidly through the now thick darkness along the principal road that led through the park to Llanmorden House, rattling noisily over the newly-laid stones that covered the way, and startling with its bright lamps the deer as they cowered for shelter from the storm under the trees, which, as the lights glanced now and then upon the dark green foliage of the pines, where morsels of the white sleet still rested, seemed like glimpses of the woods of fairyland. Very soon the

carriage drew up before the entrance ; and the coachman, who was a servant of the house, and who had been to the neighbouring railway-station to meet the visitor who sat inside, descended from his seat, beating his benumbed fingers, and rang the bell.

The summons was quickly answered by a servant, who, having let down the steps of the carriage, offered the lady, who was its sole occupant, his assistance to descend. But, with a slightly impatient gesture, she refused his proffered aid, and stepping swiftly out, had run up the flight of stone steps, and stood within the doorway, before the fat and rubicund footman, whom the bell had roused from slumbering in the pantry beside a half-empty bottle, and whose ideas were still somewhat misty from the combined effects of sleep and brandy, quite knew whether he was angry with her for rejecting his help, or gratified at the

prospect of having some one in the house who seemed inclined to give so little trouble.

As the lady enters the well-lighted hall, she raises her veil, showing a bright wilful young face, that provokes and perplexes, while at the same time it fascinates. A face that is by no means regularly beautiful, and yet is charming. A face that would have made the *grand monarque*, or the Duke of Buckingham, or any other renowned conqueror of woman's heart, when he was most out of humour with the fair sex, forget in an instant his fastidiousness, as he beheld its sparkling loveliness. The complexion is extremely bright and changeable, and the curls of soft hair are of a rich deep brown, shaded with chestnut. When she looks down, her long dark eyelashes are those of a languishing Eastern beauty, but on those lashes being raised, forth shine two mis-

chievous, intelligent, rather satirical blue Saxon eyes. The lips, though rosy, are somewhat thin, and when they are in repose, something about them makes you feel you should not like to provoke their owner. They can, however, when she is pleased, smile with much sweetness, but in the opposite humour, it must be confessed, they can wear an expression that is by no means agreeable to those who have offended her. Her dress is of plain silk, and, as seen within the large travelling cloak, her lithe figure is slight and graceful.

As the young lady entered the hall, several servants stood waiting to receive her, and to offer her their services. She only paused, however, to cast one eager glance around, as though she were in search of some one; and, as she did so, an expression of vexation and ill-humour crossed her face. In a rather haughty tone she

inquired whether Miss Morden were in the drawing-room, and being told that she was, without thanking the servants by a gesture or a word for their civilities, hurried up the oak staircase, at the top of which was the door of that apartment.

"There goes a flaunting queen enough!" observed one of the housemaids, in high dudgeon.

"She is come to look after master, I'll be bound," said another.

"But she might as well have stayed away," said the dignified footman, with a mysterious shake of his head, which implied that his intercourse with the parlour had made him conversant with family secrets.

"Well, I like her bonnet, anyhow," rejoined Kitty, who considered herself the belle of the establishment; "and I'll have one made like it directly."

CHAPTER II.

THERE was another servant of the house who, although she did not express any opinion of Miss Ashton, nevertheless observed her with evident interest. This was Louise, Miss Morden's foreign maid. She was a tall, spare woman of about forty years of age, with a sallow complexion, and jet black hair. She had once been handsome, but her beauty had faded early, as so often is the case with Southern women, and deep lines of thought and care marked her face. Her eyes were bright, piercing, and restless, and there was a resolute expression at her mouth. Her plain, but faultlessly neat grey merino dress, her small black silk apron and close fitting cap of

thick muslin, formed a singular contrast to the appearance of the untidy overdressed damsels who were her companions in service. These young ladies, regarding Louise by no means with affection, as she held herself much aloof from them, called her a stuck-up piece of goods, with more airs than manners.

As Miss Ashton ascended the stairs, Louise, who was standing upon the landing above, leant over the banisters, and for a moment fixed her eyes very eagerly upon her face. Then murmuring to herself some words in a foreign language, she retired into her mistress's dressing-room, and sat down again composedly to her needlework.

The suspicions of the servants' hall concerning the newly-arrived visitor were by no means without foundation. Sydney Ashton had been for a short time engaged to her cousin Sir Edward Morden, though

lately a coldness had sprung up between them; and perhaps the fact that the master of the house did not come forward to receive her the moment she entered it might have had something to do (though probably she herself would disown this truth) with her behaviour to his servants. Since her childhood Sydney had been a frequent inmate at Llanmorden. She had, therefore, no difficulty in finding her way straight to the drawing-room, which she entered without any ceremony, saying,

“Well, Aunt Livie, here I am, you see, though my arrival does not seem to have been awaited with much eagerness.”

“God bless me, is it you, Sydney, my dear!” cried the old lady, jumping up from her after-dinner nap, with her cap somewhat on one side, an expression of sleepy surprise on her face, and her finger still in a book, which she always went through the cere-

mony of taking in her hand when she sat down in her easy-chair of an evening, thus deluding herself into the belief that she was reading. "How very negligent of that lazy, careless man, not to tell me you had arrived! I suppose he is at the brandy bottle again."

"Indeed, Aunt Livie, it was nobody's fault that I was not introduced to you in due form, except my own," said Sydney, smiling.

"Oh! never mind, then," replied the good lady, soon appeased; "but how are you, my dear? Are you not tired with your journey?" she continued, approaching her niece, and kissing her affectionately. "Take off your wraps, and let me see how you are looking."

The young lady obeyed silently, with something of impatience, however, visible in all her movements.

"Why, Sydney, you are prettier than ever!" said Miss Morden, looking at her admiringly.

And certainly she did appear very lovely as she stood there in her dark blue silk dress, with her rich brown curls, that had been disarranged by her bonnet, falling over her shoulders, and her cheeks glowing with the warmth of the room.

"Have you any one staying here?" asked Sydney, as she stood playing restlessly with the bunch of charms that hung from her chain.

"For a wonder, no one just now—we are quite alone."

"I shall spend the evening then *tête-à-tête* with you, Aunt Livie. How charming!"

Though in reality she already felt half inclined to yawn.

"Yes, I think so. Edward has got hold of some book written by one of his literary

friends, which interests him so much that he told me after dinner he thought he should stay in his study all the evening."

"My cousin is then come back from London!" said Sydney in a tone of surprise, as though this were news to her.

Whereas the fact was that the first thing she did on arriving at the railway station, was to ask one of the officials whether Sir Edward Morden was come home.

"He returned yesterday for important business," Miss Morden hastened to reply; for she did not choose that the young lady should think he had come back on her account.

She was fond of Sydney, but she was still fonder of her nephew, and she fully believed that all the fault of their disagreements lay with the young lady. Sydney now became for upwards of a minute suddenly silent. She had caught a glimpse of a ray of light

from the back drawing-room shining through the chinks of the door, which was closed; and the idea crossed her that Sir Edward, instead of being in his study, was in reality secreted in that apartment, in order that he might watch her words and actions. As this notion gained full possession of her mind, her woman's pride rose within her. "He thinks he shall see in me a love-sick damsel," she said to herself indignantly, "but he shall find himself mistaken."

"Well, Aunt Livie," she began, in a tone of the utmost animation, "you can't think how gay we've been at Lady Lydford's. I never was so happy before in my life. Such parties, such balls, such suppers, and so many fine folk staying in the house!"

"Were there? Do tell me who they were!" cried the old lady, with all a dowager's love of the gossip of high life glistening in her eyes. "Was the young widow,

the Countess of Crumpshire there? And did Lord Larkinton pay her very decided attention? Last season they said it was the talk of the town the way he followed her about—when poor Lady L—— was in the room, too! Was not it shameful? But did you think the Countess so wonderfully handsome?”

“Dear me, no,” exclaimed Miss Ashton, firing up at once, for the lady in question had been her rival at Lady Lydford’s assemblies. “She is a pale, insipid, uninteresting thing, who can’t speak out of a drawling whisper—with a figure that is padded like a mattress, and hair as wiry as a Scotch terrier. I can’t think how any one could admire her.”

“Perhaps she was more successful than you, my dear, and therefore you are jealous of her,” said the old lady, somewhat maliciously, for she was in her heart a good deal

out of humour with Sydney for her shortcomings towards Sir Edward.

“I jealous of her!” reiterated Sydney scornfully, while her cheeks began to burn, and her words to follow one another very fast; “why, she had no admirer but that old married Lord Larkinton, who wears stays and a wig; and as for me, there was Mr. Fanrado, the young poet, who put a sonnet every day in my glove; and there was Sir Harry Smasher, who spent all the mornings this week teaching his bay mare to canter for me; and there was the Marquis of Mordelford, who waltzed with me six times at the last ball.”

“You waltzed six times, you desperate little flirt!” cried Aunt Livie, her irritation getting the better of the prudence which had hitherto kept her from openly touching on delicate ground. “You know that’s one of the things Edward does not like your doing.”

“And what business, I should like to know, is it of his, if I chose to waltz twenty times with a chimney-sweep. Our engagement was completely broken off a month ago, and I should think he must have wished it to be so after that horrid dictatorial letter he wrote me.”

“Yes, I think he did,” said Miss Morden, with provoking calmness.

“It is lucky for him, then,” retorted Sydney, nettled beyond expression by the indifference thus implied to exist in her cousin. “For the truth is, Aunt Livie, that the Marquis of Mordelford proposed to me last night.”

“What! and would you give up Edward for such a simpleton as the Marquis? I don’t believe it. I believe all the time you have been desperately in love with your cousin, and are so now.”

“Far from that, I shall be delighted to

get rid of him so easily. The Marquis is a much handsomer man, and Marchioness of Mordelford is a much higher title than Lady Morden."

And Miss Ashton drew herself up haughtily.

"If you go on talking in this heartless way, Sydney, I won't speak another word to you," said the old lady with much gravity. "I'll go on reading Dr. Bangaway's sermons, in the middle of which you stopped me when you came in. I'm sure I shall be much better employed."

And Miss Morden raised the book she had all this time been holding in her hand, with her finger in it to mark the place.

"Why, Aunt Livie," said Sydney mischievously, peeping over her shoulder as she opened it, "does Dr. Bangaway stand on his head when he preaches? You have got him upside down!"

“Don't be pert, child,” said the old lady, somewhat snappishly.

Then wishing to put off any further inquiries upon this point, she suddenly recollected that Sydney must be hungry after her journey, and ringing the bell, ordered the rubicund Snooks to bring up a plate of sandwiches with the tea.

Now Miss Ashton in reality never felt less inclined for food than at the present moment, for she had dined in the refreshment-room at the station not much more than an hour ago. She thought, however, that if she ate nothing, her cousin in his hiding-place in the back drawing-room would exult in the idea that she was pining for his sake. She therefore (although it was doing the utmost violence to her appetite) finished all the sandwiches, and said she had enjoyed them greatly. But how was she chagrined and disgusted to hear (just as she was feeling

the discomfort of her extra meal) her aunt go towards the back drawing-room, saying,

“I wonder whether little Tommy has finished yet?”

And to discover that the inhabitant of that apartment for whose edification she had said and done so much, was merely a small boy from the village school, who, having shown a talent for drawing, had become a *protégé* of Sir Edward, and came every night to his patron's house to copy from a good cast of antique art. This was too much for her. She jumped up, murmuring something about a headache, and hastily asking her aunt whether her old room was prepared for her, bade the somewhat surprised old lady good night, and left the apartment. She did not, however, proceed to her own room, by any means with much expedition.

As she passed slowly along one of the passages, she came to a door where lay on

the mat outside it a very handsome little Skye-terrier. This door seemed to have a wonderful attraction for her. For two or three minutes she lingered near it, gazing at it as though there were inscribed upon it some obscure characters she was trying to read. Then she stooped down and began to caress the dog.

“Brownie, Brownie,” she said softly, “do you remember me?”

Brownie smelt curiously the folds of her dress, and then, as if in answer to her question, licked the hand with which she smoothed his head, and looked up at her with his intelligent eyes.

“Dear Brownie,” she murmured once more, and taking the dog in her arms, in reckless defiance of the consequences to her silk dress from his sharp and somewhat dusty paws, held him close to her, while she hid her face in his long silky hair. As

she fondled him the pin of her brooch chanced to give him a prick, whereupon he uttered a slight cry.

“Brownie, Brownie,” said a voice from the neighbouring room, the door of which was a little ajar.

The dog pricked his ears and wagged his tail at the sound, and striving to release himself from her grasp, caught one of his paws in the chain that hung from her neck. By no means appreciating the honour of being bound with golden fetters, Brownie tried more violently than ever to free himself. But his efforts only resulted in winding the chain three or four times around him, until the numerous little charms which hung from it became entangled in his long hair, and indignant at the pain which this caused him, he sent forth two or three piteous whines. The voice within the room still continued to call Brownie, and the latter to howl and

struggle ; while Sydney, with a face growing every moment hotter and hotter, strove hurriedly to loose him from his trammels, only, however, in reality twining them more intricately around him.

So was it with the lady and the dog, when a gentleman appeared from within the apartment. He was a tall man, with a tranquil, handsome, slightly haughty face. The brow was lofty, the mouth firm but friendly. The eyes were dark brown, with much intellect, and much softness in their clear depths.

“What’s the matter, Brownie?” he began, but paused when he beheld Sydney, who stood before him a picture (and certainly a very pretty picture) of utter confusion.

“It was all this horrid dog’s fault,” she commenced, still pulling desperately at the chain which at length broke, and Brownie leapt to the ground, followed by a shower of

golden ornaments. "He would follow me; he would get his paws entangled in my chain. I couldn't—I couldn't—"

But here her voice fairly gave way, and she burst into tears, overcome by mingled shame and irritation, and perhaps by a deeper feeling. Her first idea was to turn round and run away, but her cousin seized her hand and stopped her.

"Why, Sydney, what is the matter?" he said, half soothingly, half smiling.

"Nothing," she sobbed, "nothing. I suppose I am sorry about my chain; I don't know what else it can be."

"That must be because I gave it you," he said, somewhat mischievously.

"No! no! no!" she answered, indignant with herself for the error she had committed. "I meant to say I hated it, and I was going to throw it into the fire to-night."

"There is a fireplace in my study, then,

all ready," he rejoined, laughing, and he led her, not without some resistance, into the room.

There he placed himself composedly in an arm-chair, and tried to induce her to sit down beside him ; but she refused with an impatient movement, and remained standing, for he still kept his hold of her hand, close to him.

"What do you mean, Sir Edward Mor-den, by bringing me here to tease and insult me in this way ?" she began, doing her best to keep back her tears, and to assume an air of offended dignity.

"Tease you, insult you, my dear Sydney, what can you possibly mean ? I found you in the passage outside my door in tears, and wasn't it right of me to bring you in here to try to console you ?"

"I tell you I want neither you nor your consolations," she retorted. "You may

laugh now, but you will find out I'm in earnest when I'm Marchioness of Mordelford."

"My sweet Sydney, when you're a Marchioness I'll be the first to wish you all happiness," he replied, still with the utmost tranquillity, still with a smile upon his lips.

"I'm much obliged to you for your considerate kindness ; and now you have given me this generous assurance, please to let me go."

"Not yet, my dear cousin, till you've told me a little more about your future prospects. Have you fixed yet upon the wedding-dress?"

"You shall not go on trifling with me in this way. It is too cruel—much too cruel !"

And her voice trembled.

"Will you not at least tell me," went on

the unsparing Sir Edward, "what is the colour of his moustache? Is it that on which you first hung your love for him?"

"How dare you talk of my being in love with any one!" she broke out passionately, stamping her little foot. "You know as well as I do that if you hadn't behaved so to me, if you hadn't written that detestable letter, I would have roasted the Marquis alive for you, and now you sit there and laugh at me."

"Indeed, I am not laughing. I can assure you I am deeply grateful to you for having ever been ready to roast a Marquis for my sake. But I suppose now I should be the one to roast."

His mocking composure was too much for her. Had he met her with reproaches and sternness, she could have returned it to him with usury; but she did not know what to make of this. At length, for once, her wo-

man's heart overcame for a short time her wilful haughtiness.

"Oh ! Edward, Edward," she exclaimed, "do not treat me in this way. Take me back again, to be what I once was to you !"

And she sank upon her knees beside him, and laid her head upon his breast.

"Sydney, you are the same to me as ever," he said softly, as his arms folded around her.

From the moment he saw her in the passage he knew perfectly well this would be the end of it ; but partly from his natural indolence, partly from a wish, perhaps, to punish her a little for her late extreme waywardness towards him, which had doubtless clashed somewhat unpleasantly against his strong will, he had determined she should be the first to come to terms. And now their hearts and their lips have met together

again. There is no sound in the still chamber save that of their voices, as soft fond words pass to and fro between them. No light (for Sir Edward had been indulging his love of musing in the semi-darkness) save that of the flickering fire. Now its gleam falls upon Sydney's glistening silk dress and wavy hair, now upon some gracefully shaped classic vase or marble bust which ornaments the richly furnished apartment, and which, seen by that fitful light, almost appears endowed with mysterious life. The air is filled with a delicate and subtle perfume which exhales from some violets placed on a table near at hand, and which seems the very breath of spring, and youth, and hope. Scarcely could you find a more luxurious tranquil retreat for love's rosy dream to be dreamed in. Scarcely could a better omen be given than it gave of a life of bright and peaceful hap-

piness, such as Sir Edward and his bride might well promise themselves.

Suddenly, while still the arms of the lovers are wound around each other, a low yet distinct peal of laughter, that seems close to them, re-echoes with a hollow, spectral sound through the dim apartment, giving the idea that some cruel, evil spirit is mocking the fallacious prophecy of that blind human foresight which pictures for them a cloudless future. Sydney screamed and clung closer to her cousin. Edward himself could not repress an involuntary start of alarm.

"What can it be?" he said uneasily; "it certainly sounded close to us."

"Oh! Edward," she murmured, as she hid her face upon his breast, "it was like nothing human! It frightens me! I feel as if it were a warning of evil to us!"

"Nonsense, my little Sydney, this is only

a fancy," he said soothingly, his momentary fear having passed away before the clear light of his reason. "Sit down here and calm yourself," and as he spoke he placed her in the chair he himself had lately occupied, "and I will see if I can make out who this ghost is. I thought the sound seemed to come from the direction of the window behind us."

Having lit a candle, he examined carefully the whole apartment, but nowhere could he find the slightest trace of anything that might explain the mystery. He then opened the window and stepped out on the balcony beyond it. The sleet that had fallen all the afternoon had ceased, and it was a clear starlit night. He looked up and down the balcony; he descended by a flight of steps that led into the garden beneath; but nowhere, though he searched on all sides, could he perceive any living thing.

No sound met his ear, but the wind which sighed among the trees with a dreary plaintive moan, as though it were chanting the dirge of the many bright spring blossoms which that day's storm had beaten to the ground, never to rise again.

Persuaded at length that his endeavours were useless, he returned to the house. Sydney had now recovered herself, and being somewhat ashamed of her extreme terror, she tried to make light of her fears. But all that evening there was a dark shadow upon them both.

CHAPTER III.

“WELL, my dear, so you and Edward have made it up again,” said Miss Morden, coming next day into the room where her niece sat reading. “I’m glad of it, for you’re a dear, pretty girl, and you’ll make a charming Lady Morden.”

“I couldn’t help it,” replied Sydney. “I met Edward last night as I was on my way to my room, and he was so out of spirits, poor fellow, that I couldn’t help taking compassion on him !”

Now, Aunt Livie believed just about as much of this last speech as Miss Ashton did herself; but not being in the Palace of Truth, she prudently forbore mentioning the fact.

“You really must take care, Sydney, about that Mordelford affair. If you are not cautious, you’ll get a bad name as a flirt. The world, my dear, is so censorious.”

“I’ve no doubt there are some envious girls, who have been trying to catch Edward; and their old mammas, who are dying to get rid of them, will set some tales about. But the only way is to care very little what the world says about you.”

“Well, girls never used to talk in that way when I was young,” said the old lady, shaking her head gravely. “But I can’t think what the young ladies are coming to now-a-days. They either go wandering all over the world by themselves, riding on dromedaries and climbing mountains; or they write books upon subjects of which they had better be ignorant; or they talk theology, as if each one of them was an

archbishop. In my youth, we were never allowed to go beyond the garden without our governess ; and we read nothing but the cookery-book and a few works of devotion."

"That must have been uncommonly dry, I should have thought," said Sydney, looking complacently at the novel in her hand. "But, Aunt Livie," she added archly, "if you led such a quiet life, I suppose you had no admirers."

"I never meant to say that, my dear," replied the old lady, in a hurry ; "far from that, there were two or three duels fought about me ; and His Royal Highness the Prince Regent was very much struck with me at a ball. I remember, I was dressed in blue satin, with a silver wreath. But it's very wrong to spend our time talking about such things as these. After all, they are but empty vanities. Dear Dr. Bangaway ex-

presses what I mean to say so beautifully in one of his sermons. If you'll just hand me the book, my dear (you'll find it in my work-basket), I'll show it you."

"Why," said Sydney, laughing, as she looked at the volume indicated, "this is no book of sermons. It is George Sand's last novel."

"Bless my heart, my dear, so it is! The housemaid must have put it there by mistake when she was dusting the room. Well, never mind, I'll read you the passage I was speaking of after dinner, and then we'll meditate a little upon the nothingness of humanity. But hark! isn't that the front door bell? It's that wearisome old Lady Lumber come to luncheon, and we shan't get rid of her for the next three hours. How tiresome! for I meant to have talked to you about the way in which I should have my new green velvet made up."

As soon as Lady Lumber, having imported a sufficient quantity of cold chicken and sherry, and exported a corresponding allowance of scandal, had been comfortably packed into her carriage, and had driven away, Sir Edward and his cousin went forth for an afternoon ride. Miss Ashton was an accomplished horsewoman, and made a very charming picture in her dark blue riding-habit and small black hat, with its drooping white feather, mounted on a grey little Arab mare, whose spirited movements she controlled with the light yet firm hand peculiar to good female equestrians.

The eye of Sir Edward, delighting as it did in all grace and beauty, was well pleased as he watched her ride at his side ; and he felt, as he looked at her, that he had indeed captured a sunbeam, which was to brighten his life.

She disputed with him a little at first, but

on the whole she made him a very pleasant companion. Though Miss Ashton read novels, flirted, and waltzed to the full extent now common amongst Young England, she was nevertheless by no means a type of the ordinary class of young ladies. Both her parents had died in her infancy; and the greater part of her girlhood, except two or three years which she had passed at a fashionable London boarding-school, had been spent at Llanmorden, where Sir Edward, who, as we are aware, was several years her senior, had often amused himself with cultivating her mind, perhaps always with a secret thought that one day she might become the companion of his life. He had taught her to love the old English and Italian poets, and had even given her a slight degree of classical knowledge. Partly from this, and partly from her own natural quickness of observation, that had

enabled her to learn much from what went on around her in the world, in which, since she grew up, she had, whilst on visits to other friends and relations, constantly moved, she could talk to a man of her cousin's tastes very differently from most other women of her age. Her conversation could, when she pleased, rise to subjects above the respective merits of the gallop and *deux temps*, or of lemon and strawberry ices, the price of white kid gloves, and the small scandal of the neighbourhood; and men of wit and intellect often came to sit beside her, attracted to her by something beyond her beauty.

In an easy, therefore, and bright flow of words, the time passed between the cousins as they rode along through the majestic scenery which surrounded Llanmorden. Now threading some deep glen among the hills, where a phantom knight of old might

have kept his enchanted lists ; now crossing a foaming torrent ; now ascending to the heights above by rough and narrow paths, that would have tried the nerves of a less practised horsewoman.

All traces of the bad weather of yesterday had passed away, and it was a brilliant spring afternoon. The birds sang, and the streamlets flashed in the sunlight, and the early buds bloomed, as though there were no such things as cloud and storm. Just as youth and beauty laugh on, as though there were no such things as sorrow and death. After some time, Sir Edward and his companion left the hills, and returned home by a road which led for a short distance along the sea-shore.

About due west of Llanmorden House there was a small cove, in which the fishermen of the neighbouring village of Aberfinlin frequently moored their boats. At a

few hundred yards from the shore there rose a little rocky island, called St. Guire's Isle, after the name of a hermit who, in the early days of Christianity in Wales, was said to have spent a life of holy meditation in this solitary spot. The island was now deserted, though before the Reformation a chapel dedicated to the saint had stood upon it, the ruins of which, perched on the top of a fantastically-shaped cliff, made St. Guire a peculiarly picturesque object in the landscape, when you looked seaward from any point in the neighbourhood.

The village of Aberfinlin was some half-mile distant from the cove above mentioned, and there was close to it only one solitary cottage, in which there dwelt a deaf and dumb woman, a pensioner of Sir Edward's, who had reached these northern shores in a singular manner.

About six years before the time of which

I am writing, a Spanish trading vessel, on her way to Liverpool, had been wrecked on the Welsh coast close to Aberfinlin. On this occasion Sir Edward, throwing off his usual indolence, had set, by his active and generous humanity, a noble example to the fishermen of the village. But all their efforts were in vain. One female only, who was rescued by Sir Edward himself, at no small peril of his life, survived the catastrophe. This female was taken to Llanmorden House, and was treated there with the utmost kindness. On her recovery they soon discovered that she was deaf and dumb, and this fact increased not a little the compassionate interest with which she was regarded by her protectors. She was a young woman, apparently about twenty years of age, short in stature, and slightly deformed in figure. The cast of her features was southern, and more re-

markable for expression than for beauty. In her large black eyes there dwelt an almost painful degree of restless intelligence, as of a soul shut out from the ordinary channel of communion with others.

After some little time she was sent to a deaf and dumb asylum at a neighbouring town, under the hope that she would there learn what might in some measure alleviate her affliction. The restraint, however, of her new mode of life seemed very distasteful to Zitta—such was the name which, in allusion to her infirmity, Sir Edward, not knowing her real one, had given her. She took no interest in anything that was taught her, refused to eat, and at length grew so evidently miserable, that she was sent back again to Llanmorden, with a letter from the directors of the asylum to the effect that they could do nothing with her. Here her health and spirits once more im-

proved. She had conceived a strange kind of affectionate devotion for Sir Edward, and her happiness seemed to consist in being in his neighbourhood. Perceiving this, as well as her peculiar predilection for being alone, the Baronet had established her in the little cottage above mentioned, near the cove, with a small weekly pension. Ever since that time Zitta had resided there, rejecting with vehement gestures any advances made towards her by the neighbouring common people, and holding communion willingly with no one save Sir Edward, Miss Morden, and Sydney. These two latter, however, had evidently only gained a place in her favour from their connection with the former. The two ladies had managed to coax her into learning from them to talk with her fingers by the deaf and dumb alphabet, and thus she could make herself understood more easily

than by signs. She seldom left her house during the day, except to purchase the few necessaries she required, but she would often wander the greater part of the night, when she was almost sure of meeting no one, up and down the solitary shore. Perhaps at such times the thoughts of the isolated stranger roamed back to far other scenes—to the cloudless skies, the dark blue waters, the fragrant breezes, and the orange groves of her native South.

In consequence of her dislike to holding any communication with them, Zitta was by no means favourably looked upon by the neighbouring peasantry, who many of them regarded her with something very near akin to a superstitious feeling. This idea was increased by her personal deformity before mentioned, and by the strangeness to northern eyes of her dress, which she still continued to wear after a Southern fashion.

Miss Morden and Sydney had frequently endeavoured, by the alphabet of signs, to learn something of her past life; but at such times she would only turn away her head and sigh deeply, and her antecedents remained a complete mystery for them.

The road which Sir Edward and his companion were now following led close by Zitta's cottage. Warned of their approach by the appearance of Brownie, who ran on in advance of them, the deaf and dumb woman stood at her door, prepared to greet them. As soon as they paused near her, she went up to the Baronet, and pressed reverently his hand to her lips, after the fashion of her Southern clime. She then turned to Miss Ashton, and though she did not repeat the same act of homage towards her, showed by evident signs her satisfaction at seeing her again, while a smile which played for an instant about her

mouth proved that her woman's instinct fully comprehended the connection between the cousins. Sydney, however, seemed only to attract her passing attention. Very soon she returned to Sir Edward, and laying her hand upon his bridle-rein, led him, somewhat to his surprise, a little way apart from his companion. Then, having cast a look of eager anxiety around, as though she half feared some one might be watching them, she began to talk to him upon her fingers so rapidly that he could scarcely follow her.

"Last night," she commenced, "between the hours of nine and ten, a woman, with her face concealed by a veil, lingered near the palings of the park. Before long another woman, with her face also hidden, joined her, and they held close communion together. I watched them, and I suspected that they meant you no good."

At first he was slightly startled, but a little consideration made him conclude that the overstrained imagination of the woman, and her affection for himself, had magnified some trifling circumstance into a subject of suspicion.

“And why did you suspect it?” he asked upon his fingers, half to humour her, half from curiosity.

“I do not know exactly why I suspected anything,” was the reply; “I think it was because my heart misgave me as I observed them.”

And she fixed upon his face a look which spoke more eloquently than words. Once more, for a moment, as he beheld that look, he was slightly disturbed. But was there, he reflected, the smallest possibility of any persons conspiring to harm him? There was not in the world, as far as he knew, a single individual who even wished him ill.

Zitta's fancy had certainly conjured up a mere visionary danger. Taking leave of her, therefore, with a friendly nod—for he wished not to annoy her by expressing to her his want of faith in her communication—he rejoined Miss Ashton.

“What was the mystery between you and Zitta?” asked Sydney, with female curiosity.

“Nothing—nothing. You know she takes me as her father confessor,” he replied, gaily; and they rode homewards without either of them perhaps giving a second thought to the matter.

Two or three times, however, that evening, when he was alone, Zitta's look came back to Sir Edward.

The room occupied by Miss Ashton at Llanmorden was not in the modern part of the house, as were most of the other inhabited apartments, but was situated in a

small turret, which, although it was close to the new portion of the building, belonged, nevertheless, to the old. She had chosen this chamber in some romantic moment of her girlhood, when she had just been reading the Waverley novels, and when her head was full of Rebecca and Mary Stuart. Since that time she had always, when she came to Llanmorden, inhabited this apartment. It was reached by a long passage, which led from the new to the old part of the house. On the evening of this day, Sydney was passing along it to go to her room—it was the hour of twilight, and the corridor was in some parts completely dark, for it was only lit by two or three narrow windows; and even at noonday it was no very bright place. Miss Ashton, however, had brought no candle with her. She was far too familiar with the passage to fear losing her way; and there would be

sufficient light in her own room to enable her to find what she wanted, a book which she had left on her dressing-table. As she was passing along the darkest part, she was suddenly arrested by the whispered tones of a voice apparently close to her.

"Sydney Ashton," it said, "pause and listen to the warning I have to give you."

A freezing terror stole over her at that mysterious sound, and she shivered as though a cold blast of wind had struck her. Involuntarily her thoughts went back to the spectral laugh of the last night, and again a dread of the supernatural took possession of her.

"What are you?" she murmured faintly.

"Trouble not yourself with what I am," replied the voice. "I am something which you cannot, perhaps, understand; but listen to me. Last night when the arms of the

master of this house were around you, you believed that a life of tranquil happiness was opening before you. But I tell you that over the head of the man to whom you are about to link your fate, there hangs a heavy cloud which will before long burst upon him, and if you are his wife it will also burst upon you."

"But how do you know this?" asked Sydney, forced to the question in spite of her extreme fear by a kind of morbid curiosity.

"I can read the future," was the answer, still in the same whispered tones it had used throughout. "Therefore be warned, and give up Edward Morden."

Give up Edward! Her whole soul revolted at the thought; and for an instant her indignation overcame her alarm.

"Never!" she exclaimed.

"Then abide the consequences of your

folly," said the voice. "And——"

But Sydney paused to hear no more. A re-action followed her momentary courage, and yielding to an overpowering dread of the darkness round her, and of the mysterious being near her, she rushed down the passage and through the door by which she had come, nor did she pause till she sank half-fainting into a chair in the well-lighted hall. It was some little time before the power of thought came back to her.

When she grew somewhat more composed, her first distinct idea was a wish to revisit the passage with a light. Had Edward been at home she would certainly immediately have had recourse to him, but that evening he was dining out. She feared, however, to go alone, and perceiving at that moment Louise the foreign maid descending the stairs, she called to her, and telling her she had heard some strange noise in the pas-

sage upstairs, begged her to accompany her thither, in order to try and find out what it was.

“A strange sound,” said Louise, in the low measured tones peculiar to her. “No wonder mademoiselle was frightened; could she at all tell what it was like?”

“I hardly know what it was like,” she replied, hurriedly.

And taking the light from the hand of Louise she turned away, and proceeded, followed by her, to the passage. Here, however, she discovered nothing. The place was still and deserted, and Sidney proceeded to the drawing-room to meditate, while Aunt Livie slept, upon her strange adventure. A little consideration made her determine that it would be useless to reveal the circumstances to Sir Edward. With his characteristic indolence and tranquillity, she knew well he would merely

laugh at the warning, and tell her her fancy had deceived her. She therefore determined to keep the matter to herself, and calmly to await events. And though even now she felt terrified as she thought of that voice, her reason made her reject the idea of its being supernatural; and if it were human, the most probable solution of the mystery seemed to be that some one was playing her a trick. For several nights, however, after this, she never again passed along that passage without a light.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE than two months had passed away. The tender verdure, the capricious skies, weeping now, now smiling, the fresh perfumes and the budding garlands of spring were no more, and in their place there had come the ripe and golden splendours of summer, even as to the blushes of girlhood succeed woman's calm dignity and matured radiance. The meadows are covered with their brown carpet of hay, that fills the soft breeze with fragrance. The heavy-laden carts toil along the village lanes on their way from the field to the farm-yard, or rattle merrily back again filled with rosy, laughing children. The

farmers, *mirabile dictu*, having nothing to grumble at, for the right weather has actually come at the right time, ride about on their sleek cobs with an expression of beaming happiness upon their round, red faces. Beneath the shade of the trees the cattle ruminates lazily knee-deep in "lush-green grasses." The air is full of myriads of humming insects, and the gorgeous butterflies flit about like brilliant fancies through the brain of a young poet.

Llanmorden House is all life and bustle. In three weeks' time Sydney Ashton is to become the bride of its master, and the marriage is to be celebrated at the little neighbouring parish church of Aberfinlin. Sir Edward and his cousin having no prospects to wait for, and holding in just horror that prolonged torment of much-enduring friends and relations, a lengthy

engagement, had resolved not to put off their wedding any longer than was absolutely necessary.

As his bride had no special home of her own, Sir Edward had judged his ancestral mansion the most fitting place for the celebration of his marriage, and indeed Sydney herself was completely a child of the old house. The fit of penitence towards her cousin, which had begun when she knelt before him entreating him to restore her to his heart, had in a few days gradually passed away, and since then she had behaved towards him with much of her old wayward haughtiness.

Sir Edward, however, seemed to trouble himself very little about this; his manner to her was uniformly tranquil and gentle, and when she fell into a passion he merely laughed at her. It must be confessed he

was far too indolent to act the part of an ardent lover, but he was certainly by no means an exigent one.

Llanmorden House was quite overflowing with visitors, and Snooks, and Mrs. Charmes the housekeeper, a formidable-looking female in stiff black silk and flying cap strings, together with all the numerous crew of under-servants, rushed about, frequently each one undoing what another had done, as though they had been the domestics in the kitchen far sunk underground of fairy-tale celebrity.

Mrs. Charmes during this press of business had been by no means in a halcyon frame of mind, and once in an ebullition of extreme wrath she had actually, being a very tall and stalwart matron, seized up one of the under-footmen, who was a mild youth of small proportions, and seated him on the hob of the kitchen range.

The visitors were most varied in rank and character. There were amongst them two or three men of high talent but low origin, and two or three members of the nobility, with pedigrees as long as your arm, and wits shorter than your little finger. Ancient belles, who strove vainly to keep their increasing *embonpoint* within due bounds by corsets, and graceful young girls in floating tarlatan. Old gentlemen with bald heads, who reposed in easy-chairs in the dining-room, newspaper in hand ; and young gentlemen with empty ones, who lounged about the stables with cigars in their mouths.

Perhaps the most remarkable of the guests were Mr. Fitzoozel, a prim, fussy, middle-aged gentleman, a distant relation of the family ; Lady Felicia, a pretty, affected damsel, of a literary and sentimental turn ; and Miss Houlder, the daughter of the Vicar

of Aberfinlin, who, although she was not staying in the house, was, nevertheless, through her long intimacy with its owners, constantly present there. Miss Houlder declared herself to be a practically useful member of society. Her duties in Aberfinlin were most multifarious. She saw to the old vicar being always dressed in parsonic fashion, kept in order the churchwardens, reprimanded frail damsels, forced rheumatic old women to attend to their devotions, worried the schoolmaster, and boxed the ears of the children. In fine, she was, as she herself expressed it, the bellows which kept alive the languid flames of social and spiritual life in the parish.

One dazzling noon about this period several of the inmates of Llanmorden were gathered together in the drawing-room, loitering away as best they might the hot summer morning till luncheon-time. Aunt

Livie reposed in her arm-chair, nominally knitting, but in reality dozing. Sydney sat reading the "Idylls of the King," with not a very good-humoured expression upon her face, for she had chosen that morning to be out of temper with Edward; now trying to soothe herself with the sorrows of Elaine, and now entering into a slight skirmish of words with a literary friend, Mr. Spencer by name, who stood near her. Miss Houlder was employing her eloquence in endeavouring to make Mr. Fitzoozel take a practical view of things in general. Lady Felicia reclined in a graceful attitude upon a sofa, with writing materials beside her, carrying on a languid flirtation with a certain Captain Snoodle of the Lancers. One young gentleman stood in the back drawing-room near two pretty girls, who were doing their best to thump the life out of a grand piano, deluding himself into the

belief that in tapping the instrument about every second with his fore-finger he was keeping time to the music. Another sat apart in the embrasure of a window by a young lady, growing confidentially tender over a photograph book. Two or three more charming specimens of our British youth lounged about in a way that gave the idea that they did not quite know what to do with their time, their arms, or their legs. These were engaged alternately in the interesting employments of yawning, pulling their moustaches, looking at their boots, and wondering what o'clock it was. The fragments of conversation which met your ear from the different groups were strangely varied.

“Well, Miss Ashton,” asked Mr. Spencer, “are you quite by this time of the laureate’s opinion that the sole duties of a husband towards the wife of his bosom are ‘to dress

her well, and compass her with sweet observances, and keep her true?"

"If it be so, there are few gentlemen who are fit for husbands now-a-days," retorted Sydney. "There is not a man who has decent taste in ladies' dress; and instead of compassing women with sweet observances, you surround them with nothing but the unpleasant odour of tobacco."

"It's so insufferably hot!" drawled Lady Felicia, who was just now in the very middle of a sentimental tale—"it's so insufferably hot, that I really can't complete the eyes of my hero. I've got as far as 'seraphically cerulean,' and I can't get one step further. Dear Captain Snoodle, pray do endeavour to help me."

"Well," replied the gallant captain, with an admiring look, "if it was the eyes of your heroine your ladyship wanted, I think perhaps I could help you."

"You false creature!" murmured Lady Felicia.

"What a magnificent march that is you have just played!" exclaimed the young gentleman who stood by the piano.

"March!" reiterated the young ladies both at once, looking up at him in the most unfeigned surprise. "Why, it was the 'Keep the Steam Up' polka!"

"I'll show you to my mind the loveliest picture in the book," says the young gentleman in the embrasure to his companion.

"Dear me! which can you mean?" replies the young lady with innocent curiosity.

He turns over the leaves, and points to a shadowy outline of the lady herself, arrayed in a velvet cloak with a muff, and all the other habiliments belonging to a northern winter, standing in the midst of an Italian landscape, with a countenance that looks as

if she had just swallowed a dose of rhubarb. She simpers and turns away.

In the midst of such conversation as this, the company were at length disturbed by the sound of a carriage driving up to the door.

“There’s that charming Mrs. Grant!” exclaimed Aunt Livie; “she said she should arrive before luncheon. I do hope she will stay several days!”

Mrs. Grant was a young widow who had very recently come into the neighbourhood, but who had so much ingratiated herself with Miss Morden, that that lady had asked her to come and form for a short time a member of the party now assembled at her nephew’s house.

“What a beautiful creature!” exclaimed Captain Snoodle, who had, from an open window, been watching the visitor descend from her carriage.

At this observation of the Captain's, all the gentlemen put their glasses in their eyes; and all the ladies drew themselves up, and looked as if they were going to put every feature and every article of dress of the new-comer, whose steps were now heard upon the stairs, through a critical custom-house.

Sydney had never seen Mrs. Grant. She had only very lately returned to Llanmorden from a three weeks' stay in town, and before she went thither Miss Morden's acquaintance with her new favourite had only just begun. Miss Ashton, therefore, participated in the curiosity of the rest of the company.

Very soon the door opened, and the object of their expectation entered, ushered in by Sir Edward himself, who had met her on the stairs, and who seemed rather gratified than otherwise to have to introduce so

fair a guest. Sydney perceived this, and it did not make her regard the new comer the more charitably. Yes, Captain Snoodle was right, she was beautiful—beautiful enough to have been the creation of Titian's pencil or Ariosto's fancy; beautiful enough to have reigned as queen at some Southern tournament; beautiful enough to have met the dreaming eye of some Eastern prophet who fell asleep meditating upon the dark-eyed houris of Paradise. She was dressed in light grey silk, with a thin black lace mantle that set off far more than it hid the faultless proportions of a form rounded in all the full grace of early womanhood—a form whose every movement was a silent melody. Her features were cast in the most perfect Grecian mould; her dark eyes seemed wells of mingled tenderness and passion; and there was a brightness in her smile

that literally brought light wherever she moved. Her complexion was a clear olive, which, as well as her accent when she spoke, at once proclaimed her a child of the South; and through which there mantled, especially when she was excited, a rich, rosy tint, that brought to one's mind "the glowing dames of Zamah's royal court."

Mrs. Grant herself did not deny her Southern nationality, for she had told Aunt Livie, soon after they became acquainted, that she was a Spaniard by birth—that she had married when very young an English officer at Gibraltar, who had brought her back with him to England—and that since his death, which had taken place about two years before, she had remained in her adopted country, having grown much attached to it.

"Mrs. Grant, my niece, Sydney Ashton," said Miss Morden, coming, in the course of

introductions, to the latter young lady;
“my dears, I hope you will be friends.”

The eyes of the two women met for the first time. Was there a *clairvoyant* power in those eyes at that moment? Why did they mutually shine with so strange a light? After a little common-place talk, Aunt Livie, who was evidently completely fascinated by her beautiful guest, accompanied the latter herself to her room, in order that she might prepare for luncheon.

“There’s something about her nose that is not aristocratic,” drawled Lady Felicia, with a yawn.

“Did you ever see anything so old-fashioned as her bonnet?” cried one lady.

“I feel instinctively that she has not been accustomed much to good society,” said another.

“I’m sure her mind is not elegant,” continued Lady Felicia.

Miss Morden had conducted Mrs. Grant to her apartment.

“I hope you'll be comfortable, my dear,” said the old lady; “it's rather a small room, but we are so full now. There is a way down from the little balcony outside your window into the conservatory. But you need not be afraid of being carried off in the middle of the night, for the door at the bottom of the staircase is locked on this side.”

“Pray, do give me the key,” cried Mrs. Grant; “I'm so fond of flowers. I should like so much to go there sometimes early in the morning.”

“I'm sure you may have it if you like,” said Miss Morden, taking down the key which hung on a nail near at hand.

That night, soon after dinner, Mrs. Grant declared herself to be suffering from a bad headache, on account of which she retired

to her room for the rest of the evening. When left alone, however, she did not go to bed or even lie down, but, putting out her light, seated herself by the open window in the summer twilight.

The bright smiles and playful glances which had lit up her face had vanished, and in their place there was an expression of troubled thought.

She had not remained thus long when the door opened, and some one entered the room. Mrs. Grant started up hurriedly.

"Fear not, my child," said a low voice close to her, in her own sweet Southern tongue.

"Madre mia, is it you already?" she exclaimed.

And an instant after she was enfolded in the arms of Louise the foreign maid.

If there was sin in the hearts of those two women—and I fear there was deep

and black sin, especially in that of the elder one—surely its darkness was for an instant eclipsed by the light of the love that shone between them in that embrace, and mother and child wept in each other's arms as pure and as genuine tears of tenderness as if they had been the brightest saints upon earth. The elder woman was the first to recover herself.

“We must put aside this weakness, Nina,” she said, forcing herself from her companion's arms; “it will unfit us for the work we have before us.”

“Many times to-day I have wished I could give up that work,” said Nina, sadly. “I feel as though I was a subtle reptile in this house—as though every one must suspect me. Every thing goes ill with me. Mother, is it too late to think of giving up?”

“Child!” said Louise vehemently, “I will not hear from you again that expres-

sion 'give up.' Give up, after we have got so far, after all the humiliation I have suffered here for you and yours? I would rather die a thousand times than even think of it."

"For heaven's sake do not talk so loud! Suppose we should be overheard!" and Nina cast an anxious glance towards the door.

"We are safe enough, I think. Those detestable servants are at supper. I seldom join them at that meal, therefore they will suspect nothing, and their masters are in the drawing-room. Still, perhaps it would be safer for us to talk together in the garden, if we could get the key of the conservatory."

"I possessed myself of that this morning. I thought very likely I should be glad sometimes to leave the house without anyone knowing it. For instance, if he were to come and meet me, I should require

it; or if it should be necessary for me to fly from the place."

Having determined upon this, each threw a shawl over her head, showing in the way she arranged it how well her national mantilla had accustomed her to such a covering; and descending the stairs that led from the balcony, they passed through the conservatory out into the garden. It seemed, in truth, no scene, that amid which they stood, for the plotting of secret evil; much rather did all nature appear one vast temple prepared for some solemn midnight service to her God, with that infinite blue vault above hung with its myriad lamps, with the green flower-spangled carpet of the earth below, and the soft breeze breathing through the trees, now rising now falling, like the swell of a distant organ, with a thousand sweet mingled perfumes mounting upwards like incense.

"It is almost like a night in dear Granada!" said Nina, with a sigh.

"Since I have been with you I have heard nothing but weak fears and vain thoughts of the past," said the other, chidingly. "Is this the woman who vowed that she would dare everything for him she loved—to whose courage and whose presence of mind we have trusted the most difficult part in our enterprise?"

"Forgive me, madre, I am but young and weak, and there have been so many passions struggling in my breast to-day, that perhaps they have wearied me. But I will try to be more firm. Still the question will come back: Suppose I should fail—suppose I should be discovered!"

"Suppose you were to go back to him, and tell him that just at the moment of danger you turned aside like a base coward, who would venture nothing for him!"

"I could not do that and live!" she replied, her breast heaving, and her step growing quicker. "I feel that it would be worth daring everything for, to bind him to me by such an obligation as this."

"Think," said Louise, who saw that she had touched the right string—"think how his lips will hang on yours, how he will press you to him, what fond caresses he will lavish on you when you go to him and tell him that it is done. Think how eternal his gratitude will be to you!"

"And even if I were to fail," cried Nina, her cheek glowing and her eye flashing—"and even if I were to fail, it would be a glorious thing to have given such a proof of woman's devotion. Yes, I will venture all for him, and forget every other feeling in the strength of my love."

"There's my own noble, courageous Nina again!" said the mother, once more throw-

ing her arms around her. "Remember, too, how the Holy Church will bless you for this deed. In recompense for the service you will have done her, she will wash away with one word of absolution any slight stain you may contract in gaining your end!"

"Yes, madre, I feel that for her sake all things are allowable," said Nina, crossing herself devoutly.

"And now tell me if you think anyone to-day has felt the least suspicion of you? I cannot believe that they have."

"I thought Miss Ashton's eyes looked more keenly at me than I liked. It must have been from some secret instinct, if it were so."

"Our sex are always the hardest to deal with—they often see when men are blind," said Louise, impatiently. "The way to deceive her will be through her woman's

jealousy. Make her believe that you are trying to steal away Edward Morden's heart from her, and that suspicion will absorb every other. It might even break off their marriage."

"I do not think I shall have the slightest chance of winning his serious attention. I can tell by merely looking at him that he is stainless—honour itself. He is a noble, high-souled man, and in his presence more than anywhere else I feel the vile part I am playing. Suppose he were to suspect me!"

"If any action of yours should excite his surprise, you must parry it with female dexterity. His suspicions must go so wide of the truth, must seem to him so without foundation, that they can never take, I am certain, a tangible form."

"I'll do my best," said Nina, firmly. Then for a short time there was silence between them.

CHAPTER V.

THE conservatory through which Nina and her companion had passed on coming out, opened into the library, an apartment which, in the evening, was seldom, if ever, occupied. It stood just where the two parts of the house joined. To the right was the old—to the left the modern and inhabited portion. In order to avoid passing this latter, from the windows of which they might have been observed, they had turned towards the other side. Here the garden soon came to an end, and passing by a gate through an iron fence, you entered a considerable space of ground, which was laid out as a shrubbery, with

gravel walks that crossed one another in every direction, as they wound among the trees. Up and down these walks the two women now moved. For some little time longer they continued in earnest conversation, into the details of which it is unnecessary for us at present to enter. At length, however, Louise said—

“It is time now for us to part. My absence from the house may be noticed. Very soon Miss Morden will be wanting me, and I can never escape from her again at night when I once go to her, as I occupy a bed in her room, and she is a light sleeper.”

“She is an easy old lady to deal with,” observed Nina, with a smile. “I can already twist her round my finger. I wish she was the only person in the house.”

“She is easy enough to manage in most things ; and if I had not been compelled to

sleep in her room, I might have been able to do without your coming here."

"It seems so strange to me, madre, to be in the same house with you, and not to be able to go to you whenever I like—to meet you as I go about the passages, and to be afraid almost to look at you."

"If you perform your task boldly and well, we shall be together again before long, to pass our whole lives with all your best love."

"And then I shall be able to have my little Arthur always with me. I don't know exactly why it is that though he has been constantly in my thoughts, I have been unwilling to mention him before to-night. It half seemed to me as though it might be casting a blight upon him to speak his name in the midst of our schemes and plotting. The little darling!—how sweetly he smiled at me when I went to wish him

good-bye on the morning I left him! I was afraid to bring him to England with me, for fear of what should happen to me here."

"He, too, will live to thank you one day for this."

"I trust he may. I sometimes please myself by forming bright plans for his future. But frequently in the midst of them my thoughts will go back to him as he is now, and dwell far more readily upon his fair childish face and his pretty winning baby ways."

"It is but the weakness of a young mother that," said Louise, rather scornfully. "You will soon grow ambitious for your son."

"Sometimes I have desponding thoughts," replied Nina with a sigh.

Scarcely had those words of misgiving left her lips, when a wailing spirit-like cry,

that broke mysteriously upon the solemn stillness of the night, sounded near them. It seemed to come neither from the heaven above nor the earth beneath, but rather to vibrate in the air as though some invisible being, as it floated by, had heard the young mother's doubts, and thus given them reality.

"Holy saints and martyrs ! what is that ?" cried Nina, clinging to her companion's arm in wild terror.

The elder woman glanced uneasily around, but she seemed by no means as much alarmed as the younger one.

"Surely it foretells some evil to my child !" said Nina, still in excessive fear—"surely it was the cry of some spirit, who meant to make known to us that my misgivings about his future would be realized ; or, perhaps, more terrible still, that even now some ill has befallen him. It may be

that at this very moment he lies cold and dead! Oh! Virgen Santisima!—thou who wast once an earthly mother thyself—help me!”

And she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

“How can you give way to such vain, childish folly!” said Louise with angry sternness. Then after a pause she added, with something of anxiety in her tone: “I fear that we may have been watched.”

“Surely,” said Nina, doing the utmost to restrain her tears, for she evidently stood in considerable awe of her mother—“surely no ordinary being could have sent forth such a sound! It was a strange, mournful cry—just such as I remember the nuns said they heard outside the window of Sister Agnes’s cell when she was dying. And I don’t think you can be quite right, madre, to say that all belief in such things is mere

folly. Father Juan, the old priest of the convent, used to say that the spiritual world was constantly, though we knew it not, in communication with ours, and that this was proved by the visions holy men and women have had of the blessed saints."

"Well," said her companion, who had now recovered her composure, with an inflection of satire in her tone, "Father Juan's opinions concerning the spiritual world are very little to us now. All that I can say is, that whether that sound was made by a human or supernatural being, I do not think we need in reality fear it. If anyone has been watching us, he could certainly form no suspicion of our real intentions, and we have been talking too low for him to hear anything."

But neither the anger nor the calmness of her companion could efface the impression made on Nina's mind. She had

been brought up in a Spanish convent, surrounded by all the often beautiful but always visionary legends of Roman Catholicism. This education had rendered her peculiarly devoted to her Church, and had given her mind, which was lively and susceptible, a tendency to superstition, which it had never lost. Louise knew this, and therefore forbore to speak any more upon the subject; and they returned to the house in silence.

“You will not, for this foolish fancy, neglect our enterprise?” said the elder woman, as they stood together in Nina’s chamber—
“you will not act carelessly, so as to let yourself be discovered?”

“No,” she replied, firmly, for she had regained now her self-command, “if he is lost, his father is still left to me.”

“And am I, then, nothing to you, Nina?” asked her companion, in a half-reproachful,

half-tender tone, which proved that the sweet instinct in a woman's soul, which yearns for affection from another, was not as yet dead within her.

Nina's only reply was to fling her arms round her neck, and, after one long embrace, they separated.

About an hour after, all within Llanmorden House had retired to rest, except a few gentlemen, among whom I fear the Baronet himself was numbered, who were doing their best, in the smoking-room, to surround themselves with vapour, till each one represented a small edition of the phantom of the Brocken. Mr. Fitzoozel had, amongst the others, withdrawn to his chamber. Now, this gentleman's going to bed was by no means an ordinary affair. It consisted in a long complicated series of rites, which, to every one save himself, were as mysterious as those in some Chinese temple. His first

proceeding, on finding himself inside his room, was carefully to lock his door, and to shake it violently three separate times, in order to try the soundness of the fastening. After this he took two chairs and placed them one on each side of his bed, taking particular care that they should be exactly opposite to each other. Upon the right-hand chair he laid a rope-ladder, to be used in case of fire, and a large hand-bell, which he carried with him wherever he went, for fear the wires in the house might be broken. On the chair to the left he placed two bottles, one of brandy, the other of smelling-salts, some lucifer matches, and a pill-box. As soon as these arrangements were completed, he began to unrobe himself, and to lay all his garments in a peculiar mystical order, which he never deviated from, upon a third chair, and arrayed himself in a gorgeous dressing-gown. He then put any article of

clean linen he might be going to wear next day through a series of tests, in order to discover whether it was properly aired ; and, finally, he arranged the brushes on his dressing-table, and everything upon his washing-stand, in a strange cabalistical fashion, taking the utmost pains that each object might stand in one particular position.

These proceedings, together with many others which I will not weary you by narrating, occupied at least an hour. The last act of all performed by Mr. Fitzoozel was always to go to the window to look out, in order to ascertain what sort of a night it was, and to arrange the curtains. On this occasion, as he took his nocturnal survey, he did not turn away from it, as was usually the case, with an expression upon his countenance of tranquil satisfaction at the thought that everything had been now properly completed, but he stood still,

gazing out in mingled perplexity and fear. There, upon the garden turf, at some little distance from the house, straight opposite his window, he saw standing, in the bright starlight, a small figure, with what looked like a white veil thrown over its head, making gesticulations with its arms towards him. At first he tried to believe that it was some other object, which, in the uncertain light, he had mistaken for such a form; but the more he looked, the more he felt persuaded that he was not mistaken.

“Dear me,” he thought to himself, considerably discomposed and alarmed, “there must be something very wrong in my system. I wonder whether it is my stomach or my brain, or whether it can be my nerves. I shouldn’t have thought it could be them,” he added, after a little consideration; “I haven’t been hearing or reading anything horrible to-night about ghosts or murders.

But if it is my nerves, I should think a little brandy would set them right," and taking up the bottle which contained that liquor, he imbibed a small quantity of it. After this he returned boldly to the window, but, horrible to relate, the figure's arms moved more violently than ever.

"I certainly must be very seriously ill!" exclaimed Mr. Fitzoozel, aloud, in a high state of alarm; "I must ring some one up!—I must have a medical man called immediately!—he must be told to bring a draught and a blister!"

So saying, he seized the bell, rushed to the door, and, having opened it, began to ring violently. The result of this proceeding was, as might be supposed, that, in a very few minutes, the passage was full of ladies and gentlemen in every kind of costume, all with startled faces, and all eagerly asking one another what was the

matter ; while three or four elderly females, who could not conveniently appear in public till they had passed through the mysteries of the toilet, increased the confusion by screaming at the tops of their voices within their chambers.

“ I shall faint instantly,” said Lady Felicia, who looked very interesting, with her long fair hair hanging about her shoulders, and a white muslin wrapper thrown around her ; “ I shall faint instantly, if somebody does not carry me this moment out of the house ! Dear me, what a thrilling incident this would be for a novel !”

“ I never saw such a set of unpractical people in my life !” cried Miss Houlder. “ Why doesn’t some one send for the firemen ?”

“ Do you think we shall have to be let down from the windows by ropes ?” asked a very corpulent old gentleman, with a rueful expression of countenance.

"Will somebody fetch a prayer-book?" cried one lady.

"Won't some gentleman support me?" exclaimed a second.

"This is all brought upon us for our sins!" groaned a third, whose religious opinions might be gathered from the fact of her being the authoress of a little book of discourses, entitled, "Salubrious Sauces for Sighing Sinners."

Now, Mr. Fitzoozle had ceased to agitate the bell the moment he saw the commotion he was causing; and, seized with a modest horror, which for a moment overcame his alarm about his own health, at the thought of encountering so many ladies in his dressing-gown, had retreated precipitately behind his bedroom door. Just at this juncture the master of the house himself appeared upon the scene, unconscious of what had caused the disturbance.

“Why, ladies, what is the matter?” said Sir Edward, half astonished, half amused; “have some of the ghosts come hither from the old side of the house?”

His question was answered by a number of voices at once, all of whom told such strangely incoherent tales, that he was just about to beg for a clearer explanation, when he was struck by the appearance of Mrs. Grant, who now came forward. She was not, as were all the other ladies, in a disordered costume; her hair was dressed as usual, and she wore the same pale primrose coloured silk dress, which she had had on that day at dinner, and which the Baronet remembered having silently noticed as becoming her so well. Her beautiful face was very pale, and there was such a singular expression of mingled fear and irritation upon it, that for a moment it wholly absorbed his attention.

“What are they all so frightened at, Sir Edward?” she said, with a strange kind of hurried embarrassment. “Do they think they have heard footsteps in the passages? If they do, I am quite sure it is mere nonsense, for I have not heard a sound.”

“You sleep so far away from this part of the house, Mrs. Grant, that anything might have happened without you hearing it,” he replied, astonished at her manner, but attributing it to nervousness. “I do not think, though, you need be frightened; for I cannot see that there is any real cause for fear.”

“You are right; there can be no cause for fear in your house,” she said with a forced laugh; then a look, the nature of which he could not exactly define, passed over her countenance, and she turned away abruptly from him.

As soon as the groups in the passages had

broken up, Sir Edward returned to his apartment, and continued reading for a considerable time. At length, in order to restore the volume to its place in his study, taking up his candle he opened his door softly, and being desirous not again to disturb the house, he moved as noiselessly as he could along the carpeted passages. Everything was very still now, and the whole place looked rather lone and ghost-like. There is certainly something mysterious about a house at night when all its inhabitants are asleep, he thought to himself; you can well fancy that in such a place, and at such a time, the world of spirits would be near you.

He had now reached his study, but how much was he surprised, as he drew near it, to see a ray of light streaming through the slightly opened door. Having pushed the latter further ajar, he looked in. There, by the table in the middle of the room, with

her back turned towards him, stood a female figure. Surprised at first, he was not less so when he recognised the pale primrose coloured silk dress and the plaits of rich black hair.

It was Mrs. Grant. For upwards of a minute he remained gazing at her form in considerable astonishment, unperceived by her. Then she turned round, and confronted him as he stood in the doorway. She gave a slight start when she beheld him, and a faint blush tinged for a moment her cheeks. These, however, were the only signs of embarrassment which she showed.

“You are surprised to see me here, Sir Edward?” she said, with her sweetest smile. “I hope you will not think that you have been entertaining as a guest a female member of the swell mob, and that I have evil intentions against your plate and valuables?”

“I certainly did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you again to-night,” he replied. “Do you want anything?—I shall be happy to serve you if I can.”

“The truth is,” she rejoined, with another radiant smile, “that, after being roused and frightened by the disturbance just now, I could not go to sleep again. It is often so with me when suddenly awakened, for I am at all times an indifferent sleeper. I thought, therefore, that I would go to the drawing-room and get a book, which would help me to wile away the time; besides which, reading at night will sometimes induce sleep. But I lost my way in this large house, and at last found myself in your study, where, I am afraid, I have been a very unexpected vision to you.”

“Unexpected, but not unwelcome,” said the Baronet, courteously.

“Well, I will not trouble you with my company any longer. I will, if you will allow me, make an inroad upon your bookcase, and then I will retire,” and she took up a volume as she spoke, and passed by him out of the room.

Had she spoken the truth?—or, if she had not, what possible reason could she have for wandering about the house at night? Such were the questions he asked himself as he went back to his room, without, however, finding any satisfactory answer; and, wearied with them, he fell asleep, with the thought that, after all, Mrs. Grant and her proceedings could be nothing to him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day, as the Baronet, with several of his guests, were returning from a visit to St. Guire's Isle, he and Sydney, together with two or three of the party, of whom Mrs. Grant was one, paused for a few minutes to exchange a kindly sign of recognition with Zitta.

The deaf and dumb woman exhibited all her usual pleasure at the sight of Sir Edward, but there was a strange degree of pre-occupation in her manner. When any one spoke to her upon his fingers, she often scarcely noticed it; and if she did, frequently made blunders in answering him. There was also a singular expression of thought and anxiety upon her face, which

was not unnoticed by Sir Edward and Miss Ashton, who knew her well. But they did not think so much of it, as they attributed it to Zitta's variability of temper, which made her moods very changeable. The Baronet, however, who, from the strong interest he took in her, watched her more closely than did Sydney, observed with some surprise that two or three times she cast an eager glance towards Mrs. Grant, and that at such moments there was an unmistakable expression of mistrust and dislike in her eyes. Could these two foreign women have known something of one another in former days? he thought to himself. For an answer to this question he looked almost involuntarily towards Mrs. Grant's face. But there every feature discountenanced such an idea. That face was unmoved and tranquil as a still lake upon a moonlight night.

They took a friendly leave of Zitta, and

moved onward. As he was turning away, Sir Edward heard a deep sigh escape the deaf and dumb woman, and he looked back again towards her. When she perceived this, she began with earnest gestures to intimate that he should remain for awhile near her. At any other time he would have complied with her wishes, but at the present moment he did not like to leave his company, and concluding that it could be nothing of much importance which she could have to communicate to him, he shook his head in denial of her request. She made an impatient movement at this, and then pointed two or three times mysteriously towards the retreating figure of Mrs. Grant. He was surprised at this, but supposed that Zitta fancied she saw in that lady a resemblance to some one she had once known; he therefore moved away, having, however, first given her to understand by signs that he

would come the next day to visit her.

Sir Edward, on that night, did not sit up so late as usual. He had finished the volume of Macaulay he was reading, and he cared not for the present to take up any of the other modern publications that lay upon his table. He felt it would be like washing the taste of full-bodied old port out of your mouth with fizzing gooseberry wine. And yet the baronet was a very universal reader. There was nothing of that ridiculous literary prudery about him which some people affect, who scorn the idea of talent in the fiction of the day, who peruse nothing but dry old divines and historians, because their fathers perused nothing else, and who refuse to let their daughters read novels, which have not one-eighth part as many improprieties in them as the young ladies have heard frequently talked about in ordinary society. He read everything, from Chaucer to the

tale of yesterday ; but he was well able to appreciate the difference between the higher and lower commodities in the vast warehouse of human intellect.

As he lay down to rest, the recollection of his strange meeting with Mrs. Grant on the previous night returned to his mind. Would she, he wondered, again perambulate the house when every one was asleep ; and if she did, what could be the meaning of such a proceeding ? In the midst of these reflections slumber surprised him ; and for some time the master of that old mansion slept on.

Without, the stars looked down with "their innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes," just as they looked down long ago upon "the nuptial shade" in Eden ; just as through the long, rolling centuries they have every night looked down on the tryst of lovers, on the bed of the dying, on the cell

of the praying saint, on the abode of black vice, on the crowded city, on the lonely ocean. Beneath their light the little streamlet in the valley flows on, singing its ceaseless hymn of glad praise; the deer slumber peacefully among the green herbage of the park; the distant ocean murmurs its monotonous melody; the wind sighs drowsily amongst the trees, as though it were performing some sleepy incantation to lull all nature into slumber.

All the clocks—the clock of the brazen voice in the church tower, that booms forth the hour majestically, as though it believed that the whole parish would be late in everything they did every day if it were not for it; the clock of the shrill tone in the kitchen, which strikes in a hurry, as though it were impatient with time for moving so slowly; the clock of the silver bell in the drawing-room, which tells its tidings so sweetly

and so clearly, that you would think it was telling you you were growing younger instead of older and nearer to the grave; the clock of the subdued note in the bedroom, which gives forth its news in so soft a key that you would think it was saying something it was ashamed of: all the clocks have just struck two. Sir Edward Morden awakes from dreaming that he is wrecked with Sydney Ashton on a desert island. To his still half sleep-veiled mind there comes the idea that he hears a slight sound in the apartment. Wondering what it can be, he turns round. The room is not very dark, for neither blind nor curtain intercepts the bright star-light that shines through the window. It was a characteristic fancy that of Edward Morden, loving, when he awoke at night, to gaze upon the clear star-gemmed heavens, and to indulge in misty dreams concerning them.

At first he thinks that he cannot be yet awake; then that he must be under some illusion; then something very like a dread of the supernatural assails him, as he becomes certain that there is a white object in yonder dark corner of the chamber. By degrees that dread which is inherent in every human breast, and which speaks so strongly of the mysterious union of the material and spiritual in our nature—that dread which can overcome the courage and the reason of the boldest man—by degrees that dread got possession of him, and he lay with every faculty absorbed in a kind of fearful expectation, with his eyes fixed upon that object. It moves—surely it moves! There is a white garment, it may be a shroud, stirring in that dim part of the room.

Gradually it comes forth from the darkness; his every sense is concentrated in the

single one of sight. It stands at length full in the starlight. It is a tall, white figure, with long black hair flowing over its back, which is turned towards him. There is a moment of horrid suspense, then it turns round, and fear is changed into astonishment. Even in that uncertain light he cannot mistake that face; it is the face of Mrs. Grant. She has laid aside to-night her primrose-coloured silk; and the white dressing-gown with which she is wrapped, and her loosely flowing hair, have given her the phantom-like appearance which just now startled him.

At first she seemed to pay no attention to him; but very soon her eyes, falling upon the bed (upon which the full starlight shone), perceived, when she drew nearer to it, that his were open, and that he was awake. A faint exclamation escaped her, but she did not pause to allow of his noticing any further effect which this dis-

covery might produce upon her; for, turning round, she proceeded to the door, and left, in evident haste, the apartment.

Great was the surprise and curiosity aroused within him by this strange visit. She was then again wandering about the house at night; and this time she had not contented herself with going into his study, but she had entered his bedchamber. What could possibly be inferred from so singular a proceeding? It seemed very evident to him now that the reason she gave last night was merely an excuse devised upon the moment; but what the real explanation of her conduct could be he was utterly unable to imagine. Was it possible that she could have some evil design against himself—and if she had, of what nature could it be?

But this notion also seemed very unlikely. What could a foreigner, and a wo-

man whom he had never beheld before, have to do with him or anything belonging to him? In spite, however, of its apparent improbability, this idea returned again and again to his mind, and he already half mistrusted Mrs. Grant.

In the midst of his perplexity, there came a remembrance of the glances which Zitta had cast towards the beautiful Spaniard, and of the way in which she had pointed after her. Was it possible that Zitta could give him any light in the matter? Was it possible that with the intuitive quickness of perception, almost amounting to *clairvoyance*, which we so often find in those who are deprived of some sense, and which seems to have been given to them as a compensation for their loss, she had discovered anything which gave in reality reason for suspecting Mrs. Grant? Was this the matter upon which that day she had so much

desired to hold communication with him, and had it anything to do with that warning of danger which he had received from her some little time ago, as he rode with Sydney on that bright spring afternoon?

“At all events,” he thought to himself, “I will go to Zitta to-morrow, and see what she has to disclose—it may, perhaps, help me to an explanation;” and having formed this resolve, he fell asleep.

The bright beams of morning were shining cheerily in at his window when Sir Edward Morden awoke next day. It was some few minutes before he could distinctly recollect the strange apparition of Mrs. Grant in his chamber last night; and when he did recall it, it seemed more like a dream than a reality. With the remembrance of it, there came also the thought of his resolution to visit Zitta that day, and he determined immediately to put it into execution.

The breakfast hour at Llanmorden was a very late one, and there would therefore be plenty of time for him to carry out this intention before that meal.

As soon as he was dressed, he went out, and took his way towards the cottage of the deaf and dumb woman. It was a glorious golden morning. Of such a one old Chaucer might well have sung—

“And rosy Phoebus riseth up so bright,
That all the orient laugheth at the sight.”

A hundred sweet perfumes were in the air; a hundred gorgeously painted insects fluttered around him, as the dreams of our youth hover sometimes about us in our age. A million bright dewdrops spangled the grass, suggesting the fancy that the fairies, when at break of day they ceased their merry dance to seek their homes amid the flowers, had cast to the ground the sparkling gems that had decked their hair, and had

left them as a beautiful yet fleeting gift, that would vanish at mortal touch, to gladden for a short space this weary prosaic world.

When Sir Edward reached Zitta's cottage, he found her somewhat surprised at receiving a visit from him so early. She evinced, however, all her usual satisfaction at his presence. Having made him enter her cottage, a privilege which she allowed to scarcely any save himself, she motioned to him to be seated; and as soon as he had complied, placed herself on a small stool at his feet, and looked up at him with her large, tender, intelligent eyes, which said plainer than words that there was something she longed to disclose to him.

"What was it you wanted to make known to me yesterday, when I left you so hurriedly?" he asked, in her own mute fashion.

"I wished to warn you against that woman who was with you, after whom I

pointed as she went away," was her reply.

"Did you ever know anything of her in former days in foreign lands, before you came here, that makes you dislike her?"

After a little hesitation she replied—

"No, nothing."

"Why, then, do you warn me against her?"

"Do you remember, one day, some weeks ago, as you rode by here with Miss Ashton, my making known to you that I had seen two women in close converse together near the paling of the park?"

He bowed in assent.

"The night before last," she went on, "I was in the shrubbery that opens out of your garden. I often now wander there, and in other places round about your house at night. I have a misgiving that there are those who are plotting ill against you, whom I may surprise. I had not been there long

before I saw two women walking up and down. Anxious to watch them, I hid myself among a little thicket of trees by which they often passed. As I observed them more attentively, I felt almost certain, from their figures and their way of walking, that they were the same whom I had seen on that former occasion. They moved several times up and down the walk near to the place where I was concealed. At length they paused for a few minutes quite close to me. As they stood there, the covering which concealed the face of one of them—for both hitherto had kept their countenances hidden—happened to fall back. The stars and the young moon were just then shining out very brightly, and for a moment I had a complete view of her face. What was my surprise and alarm when I recognized in her a woman whom I had seen that afternoon walk by this house in familiar

intercourse with you and your friends, and who, therefore, I knew must be one of your guests. So much was I disturbed by this discovery—for I felt that the danger, whatever it might be, must be very close to you—that I could not help uttering a cry. Fearing that I might be discovered, I remained no longer near them, but made my escape under cover of the trees. That very night—for I wished to communicate this to you immediately—I watched for you outside your window, and when I saw you appear at it I made signs to you to come down to me, but you did not seem to understand them, and soon left the window.”

This, then, was the interpretation of Mr. Fitzoozel's apparition. The Baronet had always formerly inhabited the apartment now occupied by that gentleman. Within the last two or three weeks, however, he had for some trifling reason changed his

room, and Zitta had never been made aware of this change. In the semi-darkness of the night she had doubtless not been able to distinguish at that distance the difference between Sir Edward and his guest. He at once perceived and explained to Zitta the mistake she had made, and made known to her that the room which he now occupied was on the ground floor, with a window that looked out upon the terrace, and was the next on that side to the old part of the house.

“But why,” he inquired, as soon as he had finished this explanation, every movement of his fingers in giving which Zitta had watched with her intelligent eyes in a way that proved she fully comprehended him—“But why do you think that these two women are the same whom you saw near the paling of the park?”

“Partly because these persons appeared

exactly similar, partly from a peculiarity I observed each time in one of them."

"What was that peculiarity?"

"I noticed that the one whose face I saw was perpetually on both occasions twisting a large black rosary, which hung from her waist, around her hands while she talked. It seemed to be a habit with her."

Sir Edward started; he had observed that very same thing himself that very day in Mrs. Grant while he conversed with her.

"And why do you suspect that they design evil against me?"

"Because there is a voice within me that tells me so. Because yesterday, as I looked in that woman's face, I could discern a restlessness in her eyes that spoke of a soul ill at ease, a subtlety in the brightness of her smile that spoke of deceit. She thinks she can deceive you by her beauty, but I implore

you trust to my power of discernment ; I am certain she is false."

Then, to add force to her supplication, Zitta threw her arms around his knees, and looked up at him, as she had done on that former occasion, with all her devoted affection, all her anxious care for him concentrated in her eyes. He was a good deal moved now, and Zitta comprehended it from his face, and seemed satisfied that she had made an impression upon him. He did not, however, remain any longer with her, for he wished to meditate on this strange matter alone.

He rose, therefore, loosed himself gently from Zitta's grasp, took a friendly leave of her and departed. After all, he thought to himself as he walked homeward, I do not see that I have got any tangible suspicion against Mrs. Grant, although her strange conduct, in wandering about the house at

night, and in entering my room, joined with what Zitta has made known to me, makes me vaguely mistrust her.

“Of what nature,” he asked himself over and over again, “could her design against him be?” The more he tried to find even a tolerably probable answer to this inquiry, the more he lost himself amid a sea of vain incoherent conjectures.

At length he determined that he would endeavour that day to make out something from Mrs. Grant herself. He would sound her as to her intentions in coming into his room last night. If she put him off again, as she had done when he found her in the study, with some plausible excuse, he would give her to understand pretty plainly that he did not believe her, and would hint his suspicions of her designs. If he did this, he thought he should be able most probably to judge from her manner whether there was

any foundation for his mistrust of her.

Having come to this determination, he felt more at ease, and received merrily Brownie's morning salutation, as he came bounding forth to meet his master.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Sir Edward entered the library, after breakfast, he found Mrs. Grant sitting there alone, apparently intent upon a book, thus affording him the opportunity he sought of a private interview with her. He was shortly followed by Sydney, who, putting her own construction on the meeting of the two, as speedily quitted the apartment, with not a little jealous indignation, which Nina was not slow to mark. Her thoughtful attitude and her delicately-chiselled profile, with a gleam of sunlight falling upon her dark hair, reminded him much of some of the pictures of the Madonna by the earlier Italian masters. It is difficult to imagine any evil of so beautiful a

creature, he thought, as, seating himself beside her, he began to consider how he might commence the conversation. She, however, saved him the trouble of doing this by boldly dashing at once into the midst of the subject which he thought she would most wish to avoid, and which he would have reached in some circuitous manner. Raising her eyes to his face with the utmost tranquillity, she said, in her most winning tones—

“I have been longing all the morning, Sir Edward, for an opportunity to apologise to you for my second strange intrusion of last night. I really am seriously afraid that you will begin to think me either a maniac, who is seized periodically with a fancy for nocturnal wandering, or else a suspicious character.”

“I certainly do not think you the former,” he said, in a tone that seemed to

imply he might perhaps think her the latter.

She did not appear, however, to notice this, but continued, with the same composure as before—

“I never saw such a difficult house as this is to find your way in. I was seized in the middle of the night with a sudden faintness, and I thought I could find my way to Miss Morden's room, where I had been in the day, to ask her for a little salvolatile. But I had not gone two steps before I once more lost myself, and, as if my evil star always led me into blunders, before long I found myself in your room.”

“It would certainly seem that some more subtle power than blind chance guides your movements when you go about this house at night,” he said, with a slight touch of irony in his manner. “But how soon did

you discover, if I may ask, that it was my room?"

"Immediately. When I looked towards the bed, I saw you lying asleep, with the starlight falling full upon you. My wish was instantly to depart as quietly as I could. But once more that horrible faintness came over me, and I was obliged, for a few minutes, to lean against the wall for support. When I recovered, and looked again towards you, I perceived you were awake. I was so disconcerted at this, that I could not then stop even to make an apology, and I ran as quickly as I could out of the room."

"The way in which you left me last night gave me more the idea of your being frightened, than of your being merely disconcerted. Was there anything in my eyes, Mrs. Grant, when they met yours, that terrified you?"

"I should never have thought that ter-

ror was the feeling which Sir Edward Mor-den's eyes would inspire," she replied, with her most insinuating smile.

"I should not think that my eyes, or the eyes of anyone, would be likely to inspire alarm, unless it were in some guilty person," he said, gazing at her fixedly as he spoke.

She bore that look boldly, but she could not prevent a deeper crimson from dyeing for a moment her cheek.

"I wonder," he went on—"I wonder whether there is any criminal now in this house, upon whom I could try the effect that a look could produce."

"I am not the keeper of the consciences of all your guests," she answered, twisting her large black rosary round her hands as she spoke, just as Zitta had described her.

"If you were to hear of some one forming mysterious designs against the man whose hospitality he was receiving, would

you say that the latter, if he were to become partially aware of those designs, was to blame if he did his utmost to try to discover and expose their author?"

"No," she replied, rather faintly, making an uneasy movement, as though he were performing upon her some painful operation.

"But if he who was being plotted against were to say to the other, 'If you cease your secret plans of evil, I will not search them out any further—I will forget even that they existed,' would you not say that that other was guilty of excessive folly if he refused such terms?"

"Do not be generous—be anything rather than generous," she murmured, imploringly, while her head sunk upon her hands, and her whole frame seemed affected by some strong emotion.

Sir Edward sat by silently watching her. All that he saw certainly strengthened his

suspensions; but his noble nature was quite ready to forgive without inquiring any more into this mystery. Nina's weakness was of very brief duration. An instant after she raised herself up, and looking steadily at him with a resolute expression in her eyes, she said firmly,

“ I should call complying with such terms excess of cowardice.”

Then not wishing directly to leave the room, lest it should seem too much as if she feared him, yet, nevertheless, being very desirous to change the course of the conversation, she took up a curiously wrought old seal which lay in an ink-stand that stood on a table near her, and appeared absorbed in the examination of it.

A very singular device was engraved on this seal, consisting of two hands, the fingers of which were twisted together in a very peculiar manner. There was a strange old

legend concerning this device, connected with the family of the Mordens. It was said that some hundreds of years ago one of Sir Edward's ancestors, who bore no very good reputation in the neighbourhood, had wooed and won as his bride, a beautiful lady who was skilled in magic. For some little time Sir Hildebrand, such was the name of the representative of the Mordens at that date, partly from the affection he bore his new consort, partly, perhaps, because he regarded her supernatural powers with no small respect, lived in a very peaceful, conjugal state.

After some few years, however, he became enamoured of another fair damsel, and wishing to make her his wife, he began to desire most anxiously to get rid of the Lady Ulrica, his present helpmate, and did his best to effect this quietly by poison. But all his efforts towards that end were of no

avail. The Lady Ulrica wore about her a talisman, which prevented all poisons from taking any effect upon her. One day, when Sir Hildebrand was with his wife in her apartment, she began to upbraid him with all his evil deeds against her ; and at length, with her irritating language, incensed him to such a degree, that, mad with passion, he drew his sword and rushed upon her. The lady fled from him through the window of her apartment on to the ramparts of the castle beyond. Sir Hildebrand followed her, and seized her in his arms to throw her from where they stood into the moat beneath. Ulrica, whose love of life was strong, clasped with both her hands one of the iron bars which was fixed in the parapet wall. But Sir Hildebrand was not to be stopped in his murderous work. With one blow of his sword he cut through both the wrists of the miserable woman, and her

body fell into the moat beneath, while the bleeding hands still remained twisted together round the iron bar. That night, so ran the legend, the ghost of Ulrica stood by Sir Hildebrand's bedside, and uttered these words :

“ Whenever any evil approaches those of your race, my spirit shall be near them to exult in it, and I will show them my severed hands as a proof of my presence.”

Ever since that day a vision of two hands, with the fingers twisted together, had been the sure presage of evil to any one of the family who beheld the apparition. Sir Hildebrand had afterwards repented of his crimes, and retired to a monastery. It was said that he himself had caused the seal to be made which Nina was now examining, in order that, every time he looked at it, it might remind him of his evil deed.

“It is a singular legend which connects the device on this seal with your family. Miss Morden told it me the other day,” said Mrs. Grant, who had recovered her self-command with wonderful rapidity. She was beginning to hope that his suspicions of her were still very vague. “Is there any well-authenticated instance of your ancestors having proved the truth of the Lady Ulrica’s threat?”

“Perhaps I myself am at this present moment an instance of its truth. Perhaps your hands, as you twist them together with your rosary, are an omen to me of coming evil,” said Sir Edward, disappointed and somewhat vexed at finding how quickly her emotion had passed.

“If my hands bring ill to one, they perhaps bring good to another who is better worthy of it,” she rejoined, half forgetting herself in her vexation at his so pertinaci-

ously reverting to his doubts concerning her.

He looked at her perplexed. Did she, then, mean to hint that there were others besides herself who were interested in her designs?

"Your words, as well as your conduct, are a constant riddle to me," he replied, with some asperity.

"Only because you choose to consider them as such. You insist upon looking at my actions by the dazzling light of your own overstrained imagination, and you are surprised if they then appear distorted."

"It does not require any very great stretch of imagination, I think, to consider your nightly proceedings in this house as, at least, very remarkable."

"I have not the slightest objection to your doing so," she answered, with a haughty composure, that irritated him more.

"You would not be as calm as this were I to search into the secrets which surround you."

"And why not? You may search as far as lies in your power from now till the day when I leave this place, and you will make out, I am certain, nothing very dreadful about me. You have entirely chosen yourself to envelop me in a supposed web of mystery. You have no good evidence to support your strange ideas."

"It is quite useless," he rejoined, rather impatiently, "for you to go on deviating any further from the truth, as you have been doing ever since I sat down here beside you. I know well you are following the crooked path, and it is vain for you to think I shall believe it is a straight one."

"Straight or crooked, it is my own, and I will not leave it."

"Mrs. Grant," he said sternly, determined

to cast off all restraint, and to speak openly to her, "I see plainly that nothing can dissuade you from the mysterious course of underhand action which you have begun. I have done my best to save you from the perils and difficulties which sooner or later must beset you, by offering to bury in oblivion all my suspicions of you if you would desist. All I can say now is, that I shall constantly watch your every proceeding—that I shall do my best to penetrate the mystery which envelopes your designs against me—and that one day you will repent most assuredly the course you have chosen, even though it should not be through my agency."

"Do your worst, Edward Morden—do your worst!" she retorted haughtily, while her eyes flashed, and her cheek glowed, and she drew up her stately figure to its full height.

Viewed at this moment, there was something almost terrible in her beauty. The soft, winning, graceful woman was gone, and there stood in her place a threatening Nemesis.

“I may, perhaps, now be a mystery to you ; but one day, Edward Morden, your curiosity concerning me will be satisfied.”

Without giving him time to say another word, she turned away from him and left the room. His endeavours to discover her designs from herself, and to overawe her, had aroused within her all the strength of opposition and resolution which her nature was capable of, and had confirmed her more than ever in her determination to carry out her intentions. For a moment, it is true, she had been half softened by his generosity, but that feeling had been soon overpowered by stronger ones.

After the foregoing conversation, Sir Ed-

ward, as he sat musing upon it, found himself no better able than formerly to conjecture what Mrs. Grant's designs were in reality. His suspicions of her were indeed confirmed, and he now felt certain that Zitta was right, and that she was really carrying on some mysterious plot against him. But he was as far as ever from knowing in what direction to turn those suspicions—the whole matter was utterly inexplicable to him. He had no tangible proof against her, and while this was the case, Nina might well defy him, as she had just done. The only thing, therefore, which he could do, was to watch her and to wait for events.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Sir Edward and Mrs. Grant had, at so early a period of her residence at Llanmorden, thus become aware of the part which each was playing towards the other, they were both far too discreet to give any signs in public of their mutual feelings. On the contrary, Nina, still hoping that her beauty and fascination of manner might in some measure influence the Baronet in her favour, did her utmost to ingratiate herself with him ; and he, being desirous to watch her without her suspecting that he was doing so, received very courteously her advances.

Their intimacy was perceived by Sydney

Ashton, and as she had not the slightest idea of the secret motives for the conduct of either of them, she was in no small degree incensed at it.

Sydney's heart was in reality as warm, as tender, and as self-devoting as is the heart of every true woman; but its workings were often impeded by the haughtiness and waywardness of her as yet unchastened spirit. Had she listened to the voice of that heart, she would have trusted implicitly in the loyalty of the love of Edward Morden, who was the very soul of truth and honour. Her pride, however, stifled in a great measure the sound of that voice, and she was irritated with her cousin for his behaviour to Mrs. Grant, and half inclined to quarrel seriously with him. She already regarded Nina with a hearty female dislike, and she gave constant expression to this feeling in those hundred

little nameless ways in which every woman knows so well how to make herself disagreeable when she pleases to another of her sex.

The state of Miss Ashton's mind did not escape Nina, but she took good care, though she exulted in it, never openly to show that she had perceived it.

Sir Edward, on the contrary, had not the slightest notion of the condition of his cousin's feelings. He set down all Sydney's fits of ill-humour towards him to the waywardness of her character, and troubled himself no further about the matter.

One evening about this period, while the gentlemen still sat over their wine in the dining-room, Sydney left the drawing-room, and, sick of the common-place flow of female small talk, which was incessantly going on there, retired to her own apartment. The fact was, Miss Ashton was

never particularly fond of ladies' society. More especially was it distasteful to her during the drowsy confidential hour after dinner, when assembled matrons usually discuss the ailments of their children, the shortcomings of their handmaidens with regard to crinolines and followers, and the favourite puddings of their husbands; and youthful damsels whisper together concerning the last fashions, the last scandal, the new curate, and the captain's whiskers.

The first thing that met Sydney's eyes as she entered her chamber, which, as has been before mentioned, was situated in the old part of the house, was the wreath of orange flowers she was to wear on her wedding-day. It had arrived that evening from town while she was dressing for dinner, and as she had not had time just then to look at it, she had told the servant who was officiating at her toilet to unpack it

after she was gone downstairs, and to leave it on her dressing-table. With a naïve, and, considering her youth and beauty, very excusable girlish desire to see how she looked in an ornament which she was to wear upon so important an occasion, she took up the wreath, and having placed it upon her head, consulted anxiously her mirror. Yes, it became her well. The little white flowers nestled amidst her rich brown hair, as though they delighted in so soft a resting-place, and the small cluster of pearls, which was placed in the centre of the garland in front, gave something almost queenly to her beauty.

Long did she gaze complacently at so charming a picture; while with all the innate taste of a pretty woman, she arranged and re-arranged the wreath, and adjusted her glossy tresses. Edward will surely think me lovely, she thought to herself;

but she paused in the midst of that thought. The remembrance of the dark eyes of Mrs. Grant suddenly overshadowed the bright course of her ideas, just as a dark thunder-cloud at times overshadows some sunlit landscape. The radiant smile which her face had lately worn was replaced by an expression of angry sadness; she sat down by the table, and, leaning her head on her hand, began to meditate upon her supposed wrongs. By degrees her reflections, still tinged with the same gloomy hue, passed from the present to the future, and a hundred vague misgivings, such as we have all experienced at one period or another of our lives, assailed her as to whether Sir Edward really loved her—whether she was a fitting wife for him—whether he had not already begun to slight and neglect her—whether her life with him would after all be a happy one.

So deeply was she absorbed in these reflections, that she did not perceive that her candle had burnt down into the socket, until it went out, and she was left with no other light than that of the rising moon, which shone in at her window. Rousing herself from her reverie, she cast a look towards her mirror. The whole room, as she saw it reflected there in that dim light, looked mysterious and ghost-like, and even her own face appeared indistinct and shadowy. A deep sigh escaped her as she arose from her seat, thinking how well the twilight agreed with her late meditations. Scarcely had that sigh been uttered, when it was re-echoed near her. She started round, and glanced uneasily into the distant corners of the apartment.

“Who is in the room?” she asked, anxiously, but no reply was given her; the chamber was still as the chamber of the

dead. She half thought it must have been an illusion, when the sigh was again repeated, breaking mysteriously the silence. A chill shudder passed through her frame. Was this a warning to tell her that her late gloomy misgivings concerning her married life were to be realized? She remained with her head bent—she did not dare look up. Well might anyone who had beheld her graceful, motionless form, in her elegant evening-dress and bridal wreath, standing in the midst of that moonlit chamber, have believed that he was looking upon some spell-bound princess of old romance, who was compelled by enchantment never to move from that position till the fated knight crossed the threshold of her apartment.

At length a low whispering voice, which filled her with fresh terror, since it brought to her recollection her strange adventure in

the dark passage on a former occasion, reached her ear.

“Sydney Ashton,” it said, “lay aside that bridal wreath, and never put it on again. An evil day is fast approaching for Edward Morden, and if you become his wife, it approaches also for you.”

The voice paused, as though expecting a reply ; but Sydney was too much troubled to be able to speak, and it continued—

“You doubtless think my words vain and improbable—but remember the heaviest thunderstorm often falls upon the serenest summer day. Before it is too late, therefore, draw back from this marriage. Do not neglect this second warning.”

The whisper ceased. For a few minutes she listened for it again in anxious fear, but as no further sound disturbed her, she grew more composed. Her first feeling, when she had somewhat recovered from the agi-

tation which the recurrence of this mysterious warning had caused, was one of despondency.

Perhaps, after all, that warning voice was right. If Sir Edward were really turning with partiality towards Mrs. Grant—if some great evil were in truth drawing near him, would it not be better to give up a union with him.

Very soon, however, her woman's heart rose up rebelliously against this latter idea. What! abandon her cousin, it said, because it had been breathed in her ear that misfortune awaited him?—surely that would be too mean an act for her even to dream of it.

After a little consideration, when the first startling effects of those strange whispered tones had somewhat passed away, there came also a notion that that voice might be but a clever artifice practised by some one,

who wished, for some reason unknown to her, to prevent her marriage with Sir Edward. Perhaps (her whole soul glowed with indignation at that thought)—perhaps it was done at the instigation of Mrs. Grant?

The mere suspicion that this last idea might be true, made her reject with scorn all further thought of paying heed to the warning. She would not, she determined, show the slightest sign of fear—she would not breathe one word about the matter to any one. Her secret enemies should not have the pleasure even of thinking that they had frightened her by their subtly devised scheme. She would go boldly forward, and, in spite of Mrs. Grant—in spite of the warning voice, become the wife of Sir Edward Morden.

But notwithstanding this courageous resolution, she could not help, especially when

she was alone, reverting at times uneasily to the notion that that mysterious voice was something more than human ; and for several nights she felt by no means very comfortable after she had put out her light, and lain down to rest. Why should not those strange whispered tones once more steal upon her ear through the darkness ?

These timid misgivings, however, did not haunt her mind that evening, when she once more entered the drawing-room, with an expression of unconcern upon her face that hid all trace of her late agitation. She found that the conversation among the circle of ladies in that apartment had grown exceedingly drowsy and languid. Aunt Livie and an old maiden lady, who was one of her particular friends, had commenced a discussion as to whether camomile-tea was most salubrious taken the last thing at night or the first thing in the morning. But their

words had gradually grown fewer and fewer, and they now sat dozing, their heads nodding involuntary salutations to each other, like two female china figures.

Lady Felicia had got hold of the luckless wife of a neighbouring country parson, who happened to be dining there that night, and who doubtless considered it a considerable distinction to hold communion with an earl's daughter, and an authoress; the poor little woman being the daughter of a retired grocer, and scarcely able to get through a common letter without asking her husband how to spell the harder words in it. Her ladyship had inflicted upon this meek, much-enduring lady a *resumé* of the plot of her last novel, and had it not been that the latter had employed her thoughts in calculating what it would cost to furnish all the children with new summer frocks, it is more than probable that she might have fallen

asleep, lulled by the oratory of her noble companion.

But even the pleasure of thus displaying herself, at length grew wearisome to the fair authoress, and having ceased her relation, she now reclined, fanning herself with half-closed eyes, while the clergyman's wife sat beside her, wondering if all people who wrote books always talked about their productions.

Miss Houlder alone had not flagged in her conversational powers. She was still, as she had been when Sydney left the room (like a well-bred terrier, who, however weary, never leaves the game it is worrying), lecturing an unfortunate girl, who was her cousin, upon her flirting manner in company. The rest of the ladies were scattered about the room, some quite silent, some sitting in groups of two or three, indulging in low-toned conversation, the disjointed fragments of which were such as these :

“Puffings of white lace are all the fashion this season. I heard it from a cousin of mine, who knows the daughter of the sister-in-law of one of the ladies-in waiting.”

“Yes, dear, I’m sure he admires you. I noticed the way he looked at you when we sat down to dinner.”

“Isn’t it shocking the way Isabella goes on with the Major! How injudicious it is of the doctor to allow it!”

“There is certainly something between them; my maid told me that she saw them walking together in the garden this morning before breakfast.”

Things, however, were a good deal changed the moment the gentlemen entered the drawing-room. Eyes began to sparkle, lips to smile, fans to flutter, peals of laughter to ring forth, and in short a general resuscitation of the ladies took place. Sir Edward proposed that the whole party should

adjourn to the music-room, and every one assenting, they proceeded thither.

This apartment, which was spacious and lofty, was situated at the opposite side of the house. Its large windows commanded a view of the wide undulating park, with its waving trees and graceful deer, and of the picturesquely-shaped hills, which rose up on either side, frequently divided from one another by narrow rocky valleys. This evening neither blind nor curtain had been drawn, and the fair landscape gained a softening charm from the full tide of moonlight which spread over it like a silver veil over a sleeping girl. A young lady fresh from a boarding-school, commenced the musical performances by executing a brilliant rattle upon the piano ; showing, as she did so, much mechanical skill, and inspiring even the tongues of the most silent gentlemen with animation.

The effect of music upon our modern society is certainly a very singular and novel one; any one who witnessed it for the first time might well suppose that some spell was being played which forced people to garrulity. Sir Edward, however, who prized—and who that has a heart does not prize—taste and expression in music far more than mere execution, was not particularly satisfied with this display. He therefore begged Miss Ashton and Mrs. Grant, who had both of them fine cultivated voices, to sing. The two ladies, who, though their minds were far from being in the same harmony as their voices were, had been lately practising together, immediately complied, for both were anxious to please him. They commenced that beautiful duet, “Hear me, Norma,” in the air of which it seems as if the heart and soul of the great composer are poured forth in a fulness of sweet pathetic

tenderness, which has, I think, never been surpassed in any other melody. In clear, exquisitely modulated tones, Sydney's ringing soprano gave forth like a silver flute the commencement of the strain. Then Nina's rich contralto took it up, every note of which seemed thrilling with the passion of her native South, and stirred the heart of the listener like the sound of distant bells at midnight.

As Sydney listened to her, she felt there was an indescribably touching power in the tones of Mrs. Grant's voice, which made them go more straight to the heart than her own had done, and so uncharitably did this make her regard Nina, that she was more than half inclined, for she was playing the accompaniment—to destroy the success of the latter by striking a false note; but, fortunately, her love of harmony prevented her. Sir Edward stood beside the two fair

songstresses, from time to time gazing at them ; and no wonder, for they were full as pleasing to the eye as to the ear.

Sydney was arrayed in a white dress, adorned with green spangles, which, together with two long feathery sprays of real fern, that hung down from her back hair, made her look fit to act, like sweet Ann Page, the part of a fairy queen. Her eyes and her cheeks glowed very brightly, and the word sparkling was the only one which could well describe her whole appearance.

Mrs. Grant wore a dress of black net, which set off to wonderful advantage the statuesque proportions of her throat and shoulders. Her hair was drawn back from her perfectly moulded face, and a single white rose was placed on one side of it.

As Sir Edward observed Nina, he was surprised to see her, when she had got about half-way through her solo, suddenly

turn crimson, while her voice faltered for a moment, and she laid her hand upon the instrument, as if for support.

Anxious to discover what could have caused her such emotion, he looked to see in what direction Nina's eyes were turned, and he perceived that they were gazing, not at the music she held in her hand, but through the window, near to which she was standing, out into the park. Was it fancy, or was it reality, which made him think he saw, just at that moment, a tall figure appear for an instant in the moonlight, and then vanish among the shadows of the surrounding trees?

As Nina's voice trembled, Miss Ashton looked up. But the agitation of the former lasted but an instant. With wonderful self-command, she overcame it, and the full tide of her voice flowed forth rich and sweet as before, so that Sydney supposed

she must have been mistaken in thinking it had faltered. Sir Edward, however, who had been watching her more closely, felt certain that she had experienced some sudden and strong emotion ; and though, after all, the figure in the park might have been that of a gamekeeper, he still was inclined to connect it with Mrs. Grant's agitation. If this were the case, here was a new thread in the web of mystery which surrounded her. For the rest of the evening he thought he could perceive in Nina's manner a certain degree of excitement. Her eyes were brighter than usual, a crimson spot burned continually upon each of her cheeks, and there was an almost wild gaiety in her manner. She seemed like one who had just taken a draught of some inspiring liquor, which had given an unusual buoyancy to her physical and mental powers. The conjectures which this awoke within

him only made him more perplexed about her than before. He determined, however, that he would, if possible, watch her movements that night, as he felt certain that this was the season when she carried on her mysterious proceedings.

CHAPTER IX.

IN pursuance of his resolve to watch that night, as far as he was able, Mrs. Grant's proceedings, Sir Edward determined to sit up in his own room until some time after all in the house had retired to rest. His intention then was to leave as quietly as possible his chamber, in order to try and discover if Nina had again commenced her inexplicable nocturnal wanderings. He, therefore, waited patiently, as the sounds which spoke of human life died by degrees away. At first frequent footsteps and voices were audible in the passages; the noise of closing doors was often heard; and now and then there came a peal of distant laughter.

But at length these sounds altogether ceased, and the whole house was apparently sunk in slumber. In order, if possible, to prevent himself from going over and over again the string of vain conjectures concerning Mrs. Grant, which had lately been passing so incessantly before his mind, that he had grown perfectly weary of them, he took up a volume of Charles Dickens's last tale, which happened to be lying upon his table. For awhile the deep, yet simple pathos, the sparkling, irresistible humour of our greatest novelist, occupied and interested him; but after a little time the importunate image of Mrs. Grant again returned to his thoughts, and, laying down the book, he went to the window and threw it open. It was a warm, still night, and for upwards of half an hour he remained standing there—now observing the effects of light and shade produced by the moonlight among the trees in the garden,

and now watching idly a few fleecy summer clouds, which swept across the sky like aerial vessels, that might have borne the imagination of a Dante or a Milton to the shining realms of which they sang.

All the while his musings ran constantly upon the strange circumstances which made him thus, as it were, a spy in his own house. Suddenly he thought he heard a sound like the soft opening and closing of a door. He looked out, but could perceive no one; and for a moment he was unable to imagine from whence the noise could have come. Very soon, however, he recollected the door that opened into the garden from the conservatory, which was situated to the right of his window, and not far from it. But as the egress from the little glass building was not on that side, he was unable to see if any one had issued from it. Just then he remembered the communication between

Mrs. Grant's room and the conservatory, and the idea immediately struck him that she must be the person who had come out through the door.

Anxious to discover if that night her wanderings were to be outside the house, he put on his hat, and as the window-sill was low enough to admit of his easily stepping over it, he passed out on to the terrace. Having walked rapidly to the other side of the conservatory he perceived, as he had expected, a female figure, which from its height and whole appearance he believed to be that of Mrs. Grant, proceeding towards the iron fence, which, as has been before mentioned, separated the garden from the shrubbery beyond. Her back was turned to him, so that she did not see him, and he waited in the shadow of the house until she had passed out through the gate. He then slowly followed her, wishing if possible to keep

her in view without being perceived by her. When he first entered the shrubbery he looked for her in vain, but before long he observed her in one of the walks at a little distance from him. Here she moved up and down the different paths for some time, while he stood watching her under cover of a clump of trees, now losing her figure in the shade, and now distinctly catching sight of it in the moonlight. At length she moved more rapidly than she had hitherto done towards another gate in the shrubbery which led into the park, and having passed through it he immediately followed her.

In this place she wandered about without any apparent object. As it was a more open space, he was obliged, from fear of discovery, to remain at a greater distance from her, and to keep as much as possible in the shadow of the trees. It was a very still night. All nature seemed sleeping beneath

the silver spell of the moon. No sound met his ear but the murmur of the little stream that ran through the valley, and the distant monotonous chime of the ocean.

No living creature was near him, save two or three deer, whom his approach had roused from their grassy couch, and who looked curiously and timidly at him, as though they suspected that he was come there for no very praiseworthy purpose. In the distance was the figure of that solitary woman, who now seemed more than ever a riddle to him. Was his patient watching that night to be rewarded? Such was the question which incessantly rose to his mind, each time making him feel more impatient, until at length he grew almost irritated, and half inclined to go up to Mrs. Grant, and to demand from her a solution of his doubts.

At length all his expectations were put an

end to, by Nina's turning round and walking rapidly back again in the direction of the house. She was now coming straight towards him, and in order to avoid being seen by her, he hid himself behind the trunk of a large oak that stood near him. Soon after he had taken this precaution, Mrs. Grant passed close to him. Thinking, probably, that there was no danger of anyone seeing her at that hour, she had thrown back her veil over her bonnet, so that he could distinctly discern her face in the clear moonlight; it wore a half-weary, half-vexed expression, that contrasted painfully with the bright animated look he had seen upon it all that evening, and he thought he could distinguish a tear upon her long dark lashes.

“I do not believe,” he thought to himself, as he gazed at her, “that the work this woman has in hand is very pleasing to

her. I think she was formed for better things. She must have some very strong motive for persevering in it."

As soon as she had proceeded a little distance, he began once more to follow her, and going back by the same way by which they had come, they again entered the shrubbery. As he was moving along one of the walks, which was darker than the rest from the circumstance of the boughs of the trees on either side of it almost meeting together overhead, he felt himself gently pulled by the coat.

A good deal startled—for, in his present disturbed state of mind he was far more easily moved than usual—he turned round, and beheld a small female figure standing close to him. For an instant he gazed at her in some uncertainty; but almost immediately, even in that dim light, he recognised Zitta.

At first he was surprised to see her in that place at that hour. But a moment's consideration showed him there was nothing very unaccountable in this. Zitta's fancy for wandering about at night was well known to him ; and as he recalled what she had told him, he had no doubt that her strong devotion to himself had induced her to remain on the watch near his house.

Without pausing to make any further sign of recognition, Zitta drew him to the end of the walk, and pointed after the receding figure of Mrs. Grant, while her face expressed something of surprise at their meeting.

As he looked from Zitta towards that solitary retreating form, he felt as if these two women, who had so singularly come in contact with each other—almost always beneath the star-lit sky of night—were both possessed of some strong subtle powers,

which were constantly to be working in contrary directions—one for good, the other for evil, to his future life.

From these unsubstantial fancies he was roused by Zitta, who, as soon as they had watched Mrs. Grant pass into the garden, beckoned him to follow herself from beneath the shade of the trees into the open moonlight, where he could more plainly see the movement of her fingers, and then began to address him in her own silent language.

“About two hours ago there was a man wandering near this house,” she commenced.

Sir Edward's mind instantly reverted to the figure he had seen in the park, from the window of the music room, and to Mrs. Grant's sudden agitation.

“Did he remain in the park?” he demanded with his fingers.

“Yes, he remained about half an hour,

and then went away by the road which leads inland up the valley. As soon as he was gone, I was so tired with wandering up and down, that I went home to rest myself. I have just returned again, and the first thing I saw was that woman. Are you watching her?"

He bowed in assent to her question.

"But what sort of a looking man was he whom you saw just now?" he inquired.

"His hat was so much drawn down over his face that I could scarcely discern any of his features. But what I did see of them seemed handsome, and his whole dress and appearance was that of a gentleman. Once, when he raised his hand, I noticed that it was white, and that there were several rings upon it."

The mystery certainly seemed to be growing more intricate. Two other people besides Mrs. Grant were apparently connected

with it; the woman whom Zitta had seen in communication with that lady on a former occasion, and this man. As these thoughts crossed Sir Edward's mind, he grew more and more uneasy. As he turned towards Zitta to thank her for her zeal in his service, and to take leave of her, for she had evidently now nothing more to communicate, she evinced a degree of emotion that both surprised and pained him. Having seized one of his hands, she first pressed it almost passionately to her lips, and then held it between her own in a firm, lingering grasp, apparently most reluctant that he should part from her, while her large eyes, which were filled with tears, were fixed upon his face in one long mournful gaze, such as we fasten upon the countenance of the dead before it is hidden from us for ever—such as the dying fasten on those loved ones they leave behind. On two former occasions

Zitta's parting gaze had moved him, but never had it half so profoundly touched him as now.

Not wishing to prolong so uncomfortable a scene, Sir Edward drew his hand gently away. She made no resistance, but as he turned from her he heard her utter two or three prolonged low moans, such as an animal suffering under bodily pain might send forth. These sounds, from an overburdened human spirit, that had no other way of expressing its anguish, no power of demanding by words sympathy from its fellows, must at any time have been very distressing to a listener. But upon Sir Edward, in his present troubled state of mind, they had a peculiarly depressing effect. It seemed to him that they were an evil omen that boded dark things for his future.

He went back to his apartment, which he re-entered once more by the window, filled

with very desponding thoughts. It seemed almost certain that some persons, whose names even were unknown to him, were engaged in mysterious designs against him, to the discovery even of the nature of which he could not obtain the slightest clue. These designs might affect his position in society, his reputation, or even his life ; and as long as he could find out nothing further about them, it was impossible for him to counteract them.

It seemed a strange—nay, almost an incredible state of things, that he, Sir Edward Morden, with his high station and great abilities, should be afraid of a single woman ; and yet he was forced to confess to himself that he was beginning to be afraid of Mrs. Grant.

Though he thus fully believed in the truth of his suspicions, these suspicions were, as both Louise and Nina had foreseen they

would be, so intangible, and so apparently without corroboration, that he felt it would be useless to proceed openly against her. If to-morrow morning he were to declare to his assembled guests that the beautiful and fascinating lady, who had subjugated with her smiles the hearts of more than half the men in the house—who, with her delicate flattery, had insinuated herself even into the confidence of several of her own sex, and who seemed the very personification of female grace and purity—if he were to declare that this lady was engaged in a dark, mysterious plot against himself, he would be simply regarded by his friends as seized with a fit of temporary lunacy. And what proofs could he bring forward conclusive enough to prevent their holding such an opinion? That she wandered about the house at night? They would, of course, tell him to believe in the reasons she had

given for doing so, which was the most natural and probable explanation of the matter. That she perambulated the park by moonlight? This merely proved a turn for romance, which invested her with all the greater interest. That when, one day, he had sounded her about her intentions, her manner had been almost openly defiant? This, they would say, had most likely arisen from her being irritated at his suspicions. Besides which, his prejudiced mind had certainly exaggerated the force of her expressions.

As for Zitta's testimony, he knew well that it would have but small weight with anyone. The eccentricities of the deaf and dumb woman were well known throughout the country, and everyone would come to the conclusion that her diseased and overstrained imagination had converted trivial circumstances into subjects of marvel. He

felt certain that such would be the course of reasoning naturally used to combat suspicions which appeared as improbable and as ill-founded as these ; and it was therefore evident to him that it would be merely exposing himself to ridicule to make them publicly known.

Had there been amongst those who were staying in the house anyone with whom he had been sufficiently intimate not to mind exhibiting himself in the light of, at best, a fanciful self-tormentor, he might, perhaps, have determined to impart to him his anxiety. But a man must be more thoroughly your friend than were any of Sir Edward Morden's guests his, to make you willing to present yourself to him in what will most probably appear a ridiculous point of view.

At length, in the midst of his desponding meditations, Sir Edward grew weary,

retired to rest, and, fortunately for himself, fell asleep.

Next morning, as is usually the case, things seemed by no means to wear so dark an aspect as they had done the last night. He felt half inclined to believe that he had been tormenting himself with gloomy forebodings somewhat unnecessarily. After all, he was not certain that Mrs. Grant's mystery was connected with himself. Why should he insist upon building up, out of the slight knowledge he had gained, a subject of alarm? Even if her designs were directed against him, it appeared but little likely that they could be of very great importance. What harm could she possibly do him?

The fact was, the state of suspicion was so completely abnormal to the usual easy tranquillity of his character, that he almost involuntarily endeavoured to free himself

from it. His efforts, however, were only partially successful, and his anxiety about the matter still weighed upon him.

Once that day, when he found himself alone with Aunt Livie, who was, he knew, the person in the house the most likely to be swayed by his opinions, he thought he would try what effect some hint of his suspicions would produce upon her.

“Do you still continue to like Mrs. Grant as much as you did, Aunt?” he asked, as carelessly as he was able.

“Do I still continue to like her? How can you ask such a question? Why, every one must think her more lovely and more charming every day they are with her?”

“I ask you, because I half fancy she is not so perfect perhaps as you all think her.”

“My dear Edward, what do you mean?” cried Miss Morden, half surprised, half in-

dignant at a word being breathed against her favourite.

“I mean what I have just said—that I have reasons for believing that Mrs. Grant’s mind and heart do not quite correspond with her person.”

“What strange illusion can you be suffering under, and what do you mean by throwing out these mysterious hints? I really do think, Edward, that you are growing terribly fanciful!”

“Perhaps some day you will not think that I have said too much about this matter,” he replied gravely.

For a few moments the old lady sat gazing at him with an expression of extreme perplexity upon her face; then, as if suddenly struck with an idea, she exclaimed,

“I know what it is that has made you take up this preposterous notion. It’s some nonsense about her coming into your study

in the middle of the night, when, poor thing, she felt ill, and wanted to find her way to my room. She has told me all about it, and said that you seemed to form very strange suspicions from so slight a circumstance. I really can't think how a sensible man like you can have such ridiculous ideas. If you do go and spread reports detrimental to this poor young creature's character on account of this, I can only say that I shall call it quite wicked of you. I never saw a more modest, correctly behaved woman in my life. But I won't talk to you any more about such folly!" and for once quite angry with her favourite nephew, the old lady rose and rustled majestically out of the room.

Mrs. Grant, then, had not only made known to Miss Morden her midnight wanderings, but had induced her to believe, evidently on purpose effectually to blind

her, that his suspicions of her had been of a very different character from what they really were. She had probably expected that he would make known his doubts of her to his aunt, and she had therefore contrived this subtle stroke of policy.

CHAPTER X.

ON the day after Sir Edward's fruitless vigil in the park, Aunt Livie was disturbed as she sat in her morning room, where she was resting for a while from the arduous duties of doing the honours of the house, by the entrance of Mrs. Grant.

"Miss Morden, I am come to ask a favour," she said, in that pretty winning manner, half caressing, half diffident, which young ladies use at times so effectually towards their elders, when they want to coax papa to take them to the county ball, or mamma not to object to their having a walk now and then with that gentlemanly young curate, who talks so instructively about

geology and botany, or when they approach a dowager who has an unmarried son with expectations.

“I shall be only too happy, my dear, to be able to do anything for you,” said the old lady, with even more than her usual warmth of manner towards her favourite, for she was just fresh from her conversation with Sir Edward about Nina, and the irritation at the supposed wrong he had done the latter had not yet died away.

“My request is not a very difficult one to satisfy. I only want to know if I may have the pony-carriage to myself to-day. I have just received a letter from my dear husband's brother who is a barrister, with a large practice. He has been out of health lately, and as he is obliged to give up his work for a short time, he is making a little tour through the principality. He is so pressed for time, that he cannot come to stay even a night

with me at my own house. But he writes me word that he shall be passing to-day through Kingowern, and he hopes that I will come to spend an hour or two with him at the hotel there. This is why I want the pony-carriage. I shall be so glad to talk over old times with him."

And Nina pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I've no doubt such a meeting will be very affecting, my dear," said Miss Morden, much touched by what she considered this charming demonstration of feeling. "I dare say there's a likeness. There is so often between brothers; and that will make the sight of him a melancholy pleasure, though a very great one to you. I will ring and order the pony-carriage to be at the door in half an hour, if that will suit you."

"Thank you. You are always so kind and so sympathising," murmured Nina, softly.

“On second thoughts,” said Aunt Livie, “I really think I will go with you. I want to get some trimming for my lavender silk of two years ago, which Louise is turning. Don’t you mention it to any one, my dear, the first time I wear it, that it is a turned dress. It looks quite like new. When I leave the shop, I have got two or three calls I want to make, and I daresay if I come back to the hotel before you are ready to go, you will not mind introducing me to your brother-in-law. All the rest of the party are going out for a pic-nic among the hills, which I have declined joining, and so there will be no one left at home to entertain.”

“It would indeed have been charming to have had your company, but I am afraid you will think it impossible to go with me when I give you a message which I received for you yesterday, but which I have actually

been so careless as to forget until this moment," said Nina, very hastily. "Yesterday, when I was out walking, I met your neighbour, Lady Elizabeth Wynne, and she told me that if it was fine to-day, she should very likely pay you a visit. Of course there is no certainty that she will come, because her health is so variable. But I suppose you would not like that there should be any chance of the poor old lady being disappointed, after her long drive, by finding you out."

"Oh! dear me, no. I shouldn't at all like to do anything uncivil to Lady Elizabeth. You know, my dear, the Wynnes are one of the oldest families in Wales, and her ladyship herself is the daughter of an earl, and, I believe, closely connected with the Duke of Barrenshire. She was presented, I remember, at the same drawing-room that I was, and her diamonds were the talk of

every one. I daresay you'll be so kind as to get the trimming for me."

"I shall be most happy. If I have good taste in anything, it is in choosing trimmings."

"I'm sure your taste in dress is always excellent," and with this complimentary remark ringing in her ears, Nina left the apartment.

"Didn't I free myself dexterously from the company of that troublesome old lady," she thought to herself, as she went to her room to put on her things. Her powers as an actress were growing every day more and more familiar to her, though there were still moments in which she despised herself for using them. Her soul and her heart were still precious jewels, though dimmed, chiefly through contact with baser objects.

A short time after, Nina was seated in the pony-carriage, driving towards the town

of Kingowern, which was about six miles distant. As she left the house, she proceeded slowly enough, for she knew that Aunt Livie, with whom the fat bay pony was an especial favourite, was watching her from the window; but as soon as she got beyond the park, she began (for she was driving herself) to use the whip more freely. At first the pony, who was little used, when he went about with Miss Morden, to such sharp treatment, shook his head, and whisked his tail rather contumaciously. Before long, however, either because he was an animal of a philosophical turn of mind, which taught him non-resistance, or because he comprehended, with a horse's wonderful instinct, that he was held by no unpractised hand, he settled quietly to his work, and bowled along at a steady, rapid trot for the rest of the way, perfectly to the satisfaction of his fair driver.

"You've been made to bustle over the road, old fellow, as you haven't been for one while," observed the small page, who had been sitting behind the carriage in attendance on the lady, as soon as Mrs. Grant had disappeared within the hotel. "She is an uncommon fine-looking woman that, and a rare one to spank along," added the precocious youth, to the boots of the establishment, who lounged near the door. After which remarks, page, pony and carriage, all retired to the stable-yard.

"Is there a gentleman called Mr. Grant staying here?" asked Nina of the sleek, smiling waiter, who received her as she entered the inn.

"Yes, ma'am. He arrived yesterday, I think, by the 2.50 train."

"Will you be so kind as to show me his room?" she said, casting, in the exuberance of eager happiness which her whole face

and manner at this moment expressed, one of her brightest smiles upon the waiter, just as, had she been a queen, she might have cast him in careless bounty a piece of gold.

“His room, ma'am, is No. 4. You can see the door from here—the first at the top of the stairs.”

“Thank you—that will do. I do not want you to announce me,” she replied, seeing the man was about to accompany her; and then she ran so rapidly up the stairs, that when she reached the door indicated, she was completely out of breath.

No wonder that she had hurried the pony, since her desire was so strong to reach her object.

A tall, slight young man, of about thirty years of age, dressed rather too much in the extreme of the fashion to suit the ideas of strict gentlemanly taste, was stretched at

full length upon a sofa in a somewhat *ennuyé* attitude, with a cigar in his mouth, and a newspaper in his hand. His features were handsome, but they were wanting in any striking expression of power or intellect, without which the most perfect beauty in a man must be always in a certain degree uninteresting and insipid. It was the sort of face which, with its lines, that told of a constitution already injured by excesses ; its small light moustache, its blue eyes, which spoke of little else than careless mirth, and the curling brown hair, overspread with a golden tinge, that clustered upon its brow—it was the sort of face which you might see look forth from the canvas of Kneller, as a sample of one of the young cavaliers who roamed up and down Whitehall in the easy-going days of Charles II.

“ Carísimo adorado ben mio !” exclaimed Nina, bursting forth into her native Spanish,

in the first expressions of her passionate joy. "Have I reached you at last!"

Then, rushing towards the gentleman, who did not trouble himself to move to receive her, although he raised his eyes towards her with some pleasure visible in them, she threw herself on her knees beside him, and clasped her arms around his neck.

"Gently, Nina, gently," he said, rather impatiently. "Why, the girl will stifle me! Have not these northern climes cooled somewhat your southern impetuosity?"

"You cannot be surprised at it, surely, Launcelot, when you remember that I have not seen you for three months? I was never separated from you so long before since first we met," she said, freeing him from her embrace, and looking half reproachfully, half sadly at him.

"To say the truth, Nina, I have missed

you a good deal, especially when I have wanted a cup of chocolate to be well made, or a song to lull me to sleep," he replied, with his usual thoughtless good-humour of manner, his momentary irritation having quite passed away. "But let me look at you, my beauty!" he continued, placing his hand beneath her chin. "I hope you've been doing nothing to spoil yourself," and he gazed at her with an eye that spoke quite as much of a connoisseur looking at a picture, as it did of real affection. "Upon my soul, Nina, you are certainly the handsomest woman I ever saw. I flatter myself that I showed I knew a little about what's what when I chose you! But come and sit here by me, and tell me how you are getting on." And as he spoke he made room for her beside him, and throwing his arm around her, drew her close to him.

She was evidently pleased with this posi-

tion, as well as with the foregoing laudatory remarks upon her beauty, for her face had reassumed its former expression of bright animation.

“I am getting on pretty well, I think, with my work,” she replied. “The thought of you, my husband, and of our child, would make anything easy to me. I believe I shall carry out our plans without any discovery being made of their real nature.”

“Llanmorden is a fine old mansion. Last night I drove within half a mile of it, and then, as I told you I was going to do in my letter, I got out, sent the carriage home, wandered round about the place for awhile, and then walked back here.”

“To think of my having forgotten your behaviour of last night till you reminded me of it yourself,” she exclaimed, while an angry gleam shot once more from her dark eyes. “It was too cruel of you, Launcelot, to

disappoint me so. You told me in your letter that you would wait somewhere near the place, however late I might come out. Then how rash it was of you to come so exactly in front of the windows. When I first saw you, I very nearly betrayed myself."

"Why, Nina, you must have been a witch to have known it was me at that distance, in the moonlight."

"You can know but little of real love if you are surprised at that. The whole evening I was full of nothing but the thought that you were near me. When I saw some one in the park, my heart told me at once it was you, and I hardly knew what I did or said. As soon as the house was quiet I went out, expecting to find you waiting for me. I fancied we should have a moonlight ramble together, as in the dear old days at Grenada. But you actually had broken your promise, and were gone!"

“Why, I was tired of waiting ; and as I had a long way to walk back here, and I knew I should see you to-day, I thought it was not worth while to stay about there any longer,” he replied composedly.

“I would have waited willingly the whole night, Launcelot, to have seen you a few hours earlier,” she said sadly.

Her irritation was gone ; she never could be angry with him long. Any third person who passed a short time with the husband and wife, could perceive that Nina, as is so often the case with women endowed with strong affections, which require some object to spend themselves upon, had set up for her idol an image of clay, cheated into the belief that it was of gold, and that the greater part of her life was now passed in doing her best still to have faith in the illusion.

“Women cannot expect men to pay back

grain for grain their excessive fondness," he said in a way that showed he was weary of the matter. "Have done with these complainings, Nina, and tell me whether any one at Llanmorden has the slightest notion of what you are about there?"

"Edward Morden suspects me, and has as good as told me so. Sometimes I am a little afraid of these suspicions; but I think I can manage to keep them so vague and uncertain that they will do us no real harm."

"I believe you are clever enough to outwit any man, my pretty Nina! But what sort of a fellow is this Edward Morden?"

"He is a noble, generous man! When he tries to spy out my designs, he rouses my spirit, and gives me strength to cope with him. But often I feel very mean, very vile in his presence; and I am half tempted to go

up to him and to confess humbly the truth."

"I trust the Saints, in consideration of the great service you are doing Holy Church, will give you strength to withstand such a temptation," he said, with a rather irreverent smile.

"Do not speak lightly, I implore you, of the blessed Saints. I can scarcely believe that they can look favourably upon the work I am doing, however much in the end it may bring glory to our beloved Church; and each day I perform some secret act of penance, and make some fresh vow, in order to prevent their anger from falling on you and little Arthur. When all this is over, Launcelot," and now she laid her hand on that of her husband, and looked supplicatingly up into his face, "will you try to lead with me a life that shall make amends for the past?"

"Oh! yes, we will see about reforming

by-and-bye," replied the young man carelessly. "But tell me, Nina, has your beauty had any effect in disturbing the attachment between Edward Morden and his cousin? Is there any chance of their marriage being put off?"

"Not the least. I have succeeded, it is true, in making Miss Ashton jealous of me, but as for him, I might as well in reality try to entice the sun from its course. His heart is entirely given to his cousin."

"He really loves the girl, does he? Poor devil! it is almost a shame to disturb him just in his billing and cooing time. I remember, Nina, how I felt towards you when we were first married;" and he kissed his wife's cheek with real tenderness.

He was as fond of her as it was consistent with his thoughtless selfish nature to be fond of anything.

"I remember those days, too, Launcelot,"

she said with a sigh, drawing closer to him. Then, after a moment's silence, she continued softly, "And now I have answered all your questions, will you not tell me something about little Arthur? How was he when you left Paris?"

"I believe he was flourishing enough. I've no doubt he'll make a fine fellow some day."

"And was he looking pretty? Had Josephine dressed him neatly, and brushed back nicely his golden curls?" asked the young mother, her eyes glistening as the image of her child rose up before her.

"I daresay Josephine has done her duty by him," replied Launcelot, with a slight yawn. These maternal inquiries were evidently not especially interesting to him. Then after a little pause he said, turning to his wife, with more eagerness than was usually visible in his careless manner, "By-the-bye, Nina, have you got any money

to spare? I am confoundedly hard up just now. Last week the luck at play ran all against me."

"I am afraid not. I have barely enough to keep up appearances; and will nothing then ever induce you, Launcelot, to abjure the gaming-table?" she added, half chidingly, half mournfully.

"Don't preach to me, Nina," he said, almost harshly. "I must say I half believe you have been wasting money extravagantly on yourself."

"I think not," she answered, evidently much hurt by this last accusation. "Perhaps this will help you a little," she added, after a moment's thought, drawing a diamond ring from her finger. "I am sorry to part with it, for you gave it me the day after we were engaged; and I never thought then you would take it back again to squander the price of it in play. Still I, and it, and every-

thing belonging to me are yours, to be used as you please."

"Upon my conscience, Nina," cried the spendthrift, his affection for her for once getting the better of every other feeling—"upon my conscience, you are the most generous, noble-hearted girl in all Europe, and I can't think how I could have been so lucky as to get hold of you. Keep the ring. I'd rather be starved alive than take it."

At that moment his admiration of her elevated for a brief space his character. For some time longer the husband and wife remained in communion with each other, eagerly discussing their future. At length Nina rose, threw her arms around him, and murmuring the words, "All will be done when we meet again," departed reluctantly from him.

The pony was not urged beyond his will on their way homewards.

CHAPTER XI.

THE short conversation concerning Mrs. Grant which Sir Edward had with Aunt Livie, while it served to confirm his suspicions of her, proved to him also how almost impossible it would be to impart his own view to others. The discernment Nina had shown in foreseeing that Miss Morden would be the person to whom he would first communicate his doubts regarding her, the ingenious way she had chosen for making the old lady impervious to his hints, increased in no small degree his estimation of her powers of intrigue, and made him feel how just was his fear and distrust of her. A woman of such cool foresight would cer-

tainly neglect nothing which could contribute to the success of her designs, and the calm defiance with which she had treated his threat that he would do his utmost to penetrate her secret plans, seemed to prove that she was tolerably confident she should be able, as long as she pleased, to baffle his efforts. These considerations made him regard the whole affair every moment in a more serious light, and strengthened his resolve to leave no means untried to fathom the mystery. His only chance, he felt certain, of doing this, was to watch Nina at night. By day there was never anything remarkable in her proceedings. She spent the greatest part of her time with the rest of the party, employing herself just the same as anyone else, and apparently trying to ingratiate herself with everyone, an endeavour in which she had been eminently successful. The old gentlemen, pleased with her pretty, half

flirting, half deferential ways towards them, all found a likeness in her to their first love, and spoke of her with admiration: the younger ones stared constantly at her through their eye-glasses, and if they were of a sentimental turn, wrote poetry about her. The ladies, it is true, on account of her superior personal attractions, were inclined to regard her with dislike; but she had even, as in the case of Miss Morden, gained high favour with many of them.

On returning from the pic-nic, of which Aunt Livie had spoken to Nina, and on learning that Mrs. Grant had been prevented from joining the party by a journey to Kingowern to meet her brother-in-law, Sir Edward was more than half inclined to regard this proceeding as in some way connected with her schemes. That night, therefore, in spite of the many chances that there seemed to be against success, he determined

once more to carry out the wearisome and hitherto unsatisfactory process of sitting up to watch, as far as possible, Nina's movements.

Accordingly, after a few turns up and down the terrace with his friends, incensing the stars with the smoke from his cigar, he went to his study to fetch some writing materials, with which he intended to employ himself in his own room during his vigil. On his way thither he met Mrs. Grant. There was nothing very remarkable in this, for, as the ladies had not retired to their rooms more than half an hour before, she might very probably have been spending the time in a little bedroom gossip with some of her female friends. As she passed him, she bade him good night, and he fancied that there was a triumphant smile upon her lips, a tranquil defiance in her eyes, which made him feel peculiarly uneasy. The

whole expression of her countenance seemed to say to him, "The silent hours of night that now approach are the season when I reign supreme in this house. I am now about to envelop myself in my mantle of secrecy. You may try if you like to raise it, but you may as well save yourself the trouble."

There was indeed something strangely mysterious in the thought of this woman, who throughout the day had been apparently the very impersonation of bright, tranquil innocence, thus at this season of darkness and repose commencing some inscrutable work of evil. It reminded him of those beautiful sorceresses that figure in Eastern story, who spend the day in bewitching unwary mortals with their seductive charms; and the night in performing their unhallowed spells. Occupied in these reflections, he reached his study.

The weather throughout the day had been of that warm, oppressive character which produces physical lassitude, and he felt weary in body as well as troubled in mind. A flask of light wine, which had been placed there by a servant according to his order, stood upon the table. He poured some into a large glass, and took a long draught. Feeling somewhat refreshed by this, he gathered together his writing materials, and went to his own room. Determined to do his best to distract his thoughts, which had been lately so constantly dwelling upon one subject, that he half fancied he was becoming a monomaniac, he set himself resolutely to work, to write a long business letter to his attorney in town. He had not, however, filled more than a couple of pages, when a feeling of drowsiness, which was rather unusual with him, for he was accustomed frequently to sit up

late reading and writing without experiencing in general any inconvenience from it, began to steal over him. Anxious to shake off this sensation, he rose, walked up and down the room, and went to the window to see if the air would enliven him.

There was small refreshment, however, to be gained in that quarter. It was a close, heavy night. Not the faintest breath of wind stirred amongst the trees, the leaves of which hung down still and motionless, like the garlands that deck the tomb in some lone subterranean chapel. Not a blade of grass—not a flower moved; all nature seemed sleeping under a drowsy spell. The whole sky was overspread with dense clouds, and the moon, with difficulty struggling through them, sent forth a few feeble rays. The very curtain of the window near which he stood hung down like the tapestry of some palace of sleep far

away in Dreamland, where neither wind nor sound ever come to disturb the unbroken repose. There was a heavy, leaden-like feeling in the whole atmosphere, which oppressed and deadened every faculty. He felt that it was little marvel that sleep should assail him on such a night as this. The wonderful mysterious power of electricity, which so often produces such singular effects upon the human frame, was abroad in the air, and a thunderstorm was at hand. Resolved, nevertheless, to do his utmost to struggle against this inopportune drowsiness, chiefly because he wished to remain awake for the purpose of watching Mrs. Grant, he sat down again, and taking up his pen, tried to occupy his mind with the subject about which he was writing. But these efforts were vain ; his ideas incessantly grew confused, and he felt more and more unable to resist the soft power of sleep.

At length, influenced partly, perhaps, by his characteristic indolence, which had not yet been sufficiently disturbed by his fear of Mrs. Grant to prevent it from inclining him, as it usually did, to consult his own physical ease, he made up his mind to yield to this feeling. Mrs. Grant must remain unwatched ; but, his wish probably being the father to his course of reasoning, he persuaded himself that it was not likely she would that night especially work him any harm by her mysterious proceedings, and that he would have other opportunities of carrying out his intentions concerning her. He therefore locked his door—a precaution he had taken since Nina's nocturnal visit to his chamber—closed partially the window, leaving it, however, a little open, on account of the warmth of the night, with the blind drawn down over the aperture, and then went to bed, where he al-

most instantly fell into a deep slumber.

For some time he slept on, utterly unconscious of outward things—slept, though the thunder came rolling upward from the west, sounding every minute nearer and nearer, like the warning voice of a mighty archangel, bidding a sinful world awake from her careless trance. Slept, whilst it pealed so near, that the neighbouring hills re-echoed the awful note, each one thus taking his part in the grandest and most tremendous harmony of nature's varied concert. Slept, whilst the rain rattled down upon the foliage in the garden, suggesting to the ear of fancy the idea that a thousand fairy horses were galloping over the leaves. Slept, whilst the lightning cast a momentary blue light over the grey breast of ocean, or glided up and down the dark faces of the rocks, or played around the summits of the mountains, like fiery chains shaken for an

instant around those rugged brows by some tricky storm-sprite, in his wild airy gambols, or glanced in and out of the lowly cottage of the fisherman, or darted along the luxurious apartments at Llanmorden, or flashed about the grey church spire, or shot through some deep ravine. Over everything that it approaches it casts a vivid splendour, reminding us thus of the electric fire of imagination, which can make bright and distinct every object that it touches, however varied may be their form.

Even when the storm had rolled away, and the dark clouds had cleared from the sky, and the silver moon shone down once more upon the earth, now all redolent of that ineffable perfume which follows rain in summer—even then Edward Morden slept. At length, however, there is a slight break to that profound repose. He turns round upon his bed in that kind of twilight state

which sometimes exists between sleeping and waking. He is conscious that he is in his own chamber at night, but his mind has not any distinct perception of the thoughts that are passing through it. Suddenly, to his sleep-deadened senses, there comes the idea that there is a noise at the window towards which his face is turned. By no means as yet sufficiently awake to be much startled by it, as he certainly would have been had his faculties been in a state of full activity, he opens his eyes.

There, from underneath the window-blind, he sees two small white hands appear, the fingers of which twist themselves strangely together, and then vanish; while it seems to him that a sound which resembled a shrill cry meets his ear.

The surprise caused him by this circumstance, together with the remembrance of the singular and fearful legend which con-

nected an apparition of this kind with his family, served to arouse in a considerable degree his deadened powers of thought, though he still experienced throughout his frame an unwonted physical languor, which made him feel inclined not to move.

For some few minutes, yielding to this feeling, he lay still, while uneasy fancies throng through his brain. The warning hands, the precursors of calamity to his race, had then appeared to him. Surely some great evil must be near; surely—and his mind once more reverted to the subject which had so long harassed it—surely Mrs. Grant was the author of that evil. His reason, which still, together with all his other mental faculties, was in a degree overpowered by the kind of torpor that held dominion over his body, strove, but feebly, to check these fanciful ideas; and for awhile imagination had it all her own way. Indis-

tinct yet dark pictures of what that woman might be now doing, desponding thoughts concerning the inexplicable evil which drew near him, a vague dread of the supernatural—such were the subjects which for a short time occupied his thoughts.

At length his clear, manly common sense came to his rescue in the midst of this gloomy labyrinth. With a violent effort he threw aside all these unsubstantial visionary ideas. Simple reason told him that these mysterious hands had in reality nothing to do with the world of spirits; but whose they could be, or why thus thrust in at his window, he was utterly unable to imagine. If he were to go out into the garden, should he, he wondered, find any one there who could explain the mystery? Using his strong will, which, although seldom brought into play, was nevertheless one of his marked peculiarities, to overcome the strange

feeling of corporeal inertness and the desire attendant upon it to remain in his present recumbent position, he got resolutely out of bed.

At first he felt dizzy, and his head throbbed and ached, but with a strength of purpose which would perhaps have surprised any one who merely knew him in his tranquil and rather indolent every-day character, he struggled firmly against these sensations, which prompted him to return immediately to bed ; and having put on some of his clothes as rapidly as he could, he passed out through the window into the garden.

Here he wandered about, vainly looking for some one. The whole place was still and deserted ; the fresh breeze, however, which was now blowing, and which had followed the storm, revived his physical powers, and cooled his heated brain ; and

as he reflected more calmly upon the matter, and remembered that some little time had elapsed between the apparition of the hands and the moment when he came out, he felt that their owner would have had full space to escape. Once he was half inclined to think that the whole affair might be an illusion of his imagination; but the vision, even in the dim light of his chamber, had been so distinct that he soon put aside this thought. All at once the idea struck him, could those warning hands have been the hands of Mrs. Grant? Could she have hoped, by a dexterous use of this family superstition, to cause him an alarm, which would in some way facilitate her designs against him?

The more he meditated upon this notion, the more probable it seemed to him. While he was reflecting upon it, he happened to approach the door of the conservatory,

and he remembered the communication between it and Nina's chamber ; he determined to ascend to the balcony outside that apartment, in order to see if he could find out by this means anything concerning Mrs. Grant. He therefore passed through the conservatory, mounted the stairs, and very soon stood in the balcony outside the window of the room. No gleam of light shot from it, but as no blind was drawn down inside, he could see, by aid of the clear moonbeams, distinctly into the chamber. The light fell full upon the bed, which stood near the window, and he perceived that it was unoccupied. He then cast a scrutinising glance around the small chamber, but could see no one.

Having obtained all the information he could gain from without, and his sense of honour forbidding him to enter the room, and search there to discover something

which might help him to make out who Nina really was, he returned to his own apartment. There he lit a candle, and proceeded to visit all the unoccupied rooms, and all the passages of the house, quite expecting to meet somewhere Mrs. Grant. But he saw nothing save the reflection of his own form in the mirrors, heard nothing but the mice stirring behind the wainscot, and the creaking of the boards beneath his feet. It seemed almost certain that Mrs. Grant was not in the house. But very little could be inferred from this circumstance.

Disappointed at the fruitlessness of his efforts, he once more returned to his own room; and, as he still experienced a kind of dizziness, that made him feel he should be glad of repose, he again retired to rest.

After a little time, in the midst of his reflections upon the strange circumstances, which every moment grew stranger, in

which he was involved with regard to Mrs. Grant, he fell asleep. His slumber, however, was not as it had formerly been, deep and calm—it was troubled and restless, and full of uneasy, grotesque visions. One dream the next morning especially haunted him. In it, it seemed to him, that he found himself, with Sydney Ashton, upon a troubled sea, in a small boat, just in view of the rocky cove close to Zitta's cottage. Many times it appeared to him the waves almost carried the boat safely to the land, but a strong gust of wind always drove it back again into mid ocean. This wind was, he thought, raised by Nina, who stood upon the shore, with an expression of haughty triumph upon her beautiful face, holding in her hand a black enchanted wand, by which she had power to control the elements. In the midst of the anxiety caused him by this, he looked up towards a neighbouring rock,

and beheld Zitta standing upon it, her countenance full of uneasiness, with her arms stretched towards him, as though in the act of bidding him farewell. When she saw he was looking at her, he thought that she raised one of her hands, and pointed several times with the most eager earnestness of gesture towards the Isle of St. Guire. Then it seemed to him that she fell to the ground with a shrill cry, and with that cry he awoke.

So strong was the impression made upon him by this dream, and so much did it turn his thoughts towards Zitta, that next morning he determined to go the first thing to visit her, in order to inquire from her whether, during this last night, she had seen anything of Mrs. Grant's proceedings; and as soon as he had dressed himself, he prepared to go to her before breakfast.

CHAPTER XII.

AS Sir Edward was about to leave his room, his eye was attracted by a small shining object which lay on the ground near his dressing-table, and which glittered very brightly in the beams of the morning sun, that now poured in through the window.

Wondering what it could be, he picked it up, and saw with considerable surprise that it was an amethyst set in gold, which, to judge by a little ring that was attached to one end of it, had formed a pendant to a brooch, or some other female ornament. He gazed somewhat uneasily at it. This precious gem, with its chased rich setting, had certainly never formed part of the

tawdry jewelry that is displayed in the servants' hall, and the housemaid was the only female that usually entered his apartment. It might, perhaps, have belonged to Miss Morden, who might have come to his room to see if the curtains were clean, or for some other housewifery purpose ; but from what he knew of his aunt's character, he thought it extremely unlikely that just now, when her mind was full of entertaining her guests, and of preparations for the approaching marriage, she would be attending thus minutely to domestic arrangements. It might have been dropped by one of his lady guests, who had wandered into this apartment by mistake.

On the whole, however, it seemed on consideration very improbable that the jewel could have lain there since yesterday, without his having injured it by treading upon it as he crossed and recrossed the room.

He therefore came to the conclusion that it must have been dropped there during the night ; and he soon made up his mind that some one had been in the room whilst he was asleep, and that *that* some one was Mrs. Grant. She must have entered by the window, since the door was locked—a fact which proved how determined she was not to be baffled in her designs.

By yielding to that unlucky drowsiness last night, he had probably given her the very opportunity she sought of entering his room unperceived. It was still very early when he once more passed out through the window to avoid the observations of the servants who were already at their work. The strange, uncomfortable physical sensations which he had experienced when he woke in the middle of the night, had now passed completely away ; and as he recalled them, together with the apparition of the

hands, and his long lonely wandering about the silent garden and house, he felt for a moment half inclined to regard the whole affair as merely a troubled dream. His next thought was the question—For what reason could Mrs. Grant have been in his room? But this he was utterly unable to answer. He had examined carefully the whole apartment before he came out; but nowhere had he found the least trace of anything having been moved—even the letter, in the midst of writing which he had paused last night, still lay upon the table exactly in the same position in which he had left it, with the pen placed upon it.

As he turned out of one shady garden walk into another, that led towards the gate, he was a good deal startled by coming suddenly upon the object of all his perplexities, Nina herself, who was walking along in the direction of the house.

“Good morning, Mrs. Grant,” he said, eyeing her keenly as he spoke.

It seemed to him that her cheeks were paler, and her dark hair more disordered than usual. And when he directed his scrutiny towards her figure instead of her countenance, he thought that the thick cloth cloak which she wore looked by no means like the sort of garment that a lady would throw over her shoulders, on going out for a stroll in the garden upon a very warm summer morning. He fancied, also, that there was something of embarrassment in her manner, and that her smile was scarcely as bright as usual when she returned his greeting, and then added,

“I daresay you are surprised, Sir Edward, to see me out so early; but I have always a liking for breathing the fresh air of morning, and I sometimes indulge in it. I suppose I must have learned this fancy in my

native Southern climate, where the breezes at this early hour are often the only refreshment you can get during the day."

As she spoke he noticed that she leaned against a tree that was near her, like one suffering from fatigue.

"I should have said, from what I know of your habits, that you are fonder of wandering by moonlight than at sunrise," he said, with something marked in the tone of his voice, for he knew well that it was vain now to try to hide the feelings with which he regarded her.

"The nights in Spain are perhaps more lovely than the mornings, and perhaps I did also in my youth contract a taste for midnight rambles," she answered quietly, for she had now recovered her composure.

"And you find the park here a pleasant place for the gratification of that taste, I suppose?"

“You happened, then, to be out that night yourself when I took a little stroll by moonlight? Why did you not join me? I should have been so charmed to have had a companion. Did you watch me from behind the park fence? I have no doubt you thought I was in love, or else that I was a lunatic, or a poetess, which, by-the-by, in these prosaic days are regarded as synonymous titles. Tell me, did you not think I was composing a sonnet to the red beard of the fascinating young gentleman by whom I had been sitting at dinner?”

“Indeed, Mrs. Grant, I fancied you were occupied with far subtler matters than these.”

“Men always think that women must be framing schemes when they are alone,” she replied carelessly. Then, after a moment's silence, she added, gazing at him rather eagerly, “What a terrific storm that was

last night! I don't think I ever heard anything grander than the way in which the thunder rolled amongst the hills."

"Was there a thunder-storm last night?" he asked with some surprise, for his profound sleep had made him insensible to the tumult that had been going on in nature.

When he went out into the garden in the middle of the night he had perceived that the ground was very wet, but he concluded that there had been merely an ordinary shower.

"You really, then, were not awoke by it? What a sound sleeper you must be!"

And he thought there was something of covert malice in the smile which accompanied these words. Nettled at this, he determined to make a bold stroke.

"I suppose the storm must have been over when you started upon the ramble, from which, to judge from your appearance,

you are just returning," and as he spoke he watched narrowly her face.

"Sir Edward, what do you mean?" she exclaimed quickly, reddening either from shame or from anger; "I do not understand the drift of your wit. Pray explain it to me."

"My words had no wit in them, but merely simple truth," he rejoined gravely.

"I am certain, Mrs. Grant, that you spent the greater part of last night outside the walls of Llanmorden House."

"I think you might choose better subjects for jest than this, Sir Edward Morden," she replied, now assuming a tone of indignation.

"Though I have lived several years in England, I have not yet learnt that one of the duties of an English gentleman is to act as a spy upon his guests, and to misconstrue their smallest actions."

"And though I have read much of your

country, Mrs. Grant, I was not aware that deceit was regarded there as the first duty of woman," he retorted.

"The thunder-storm last night certainly seems to have turned your brain, just as dairymaids say it turns a basin of milk," she replied, apparently thinking it better, after all, not to seem to regard the matter in a serious light. Then, evidently desirous to terminate the conversation, she continued—"Since you are in such a strange state of mind this morning, I shall leave you, hoping that solitude may do you good. Good-bye, therefore, for the present," and she turned away from him.

As Sir Edward looked after her retreating figure, his eye became suddenly fixed upon the hinder part of her cloak, which was partially raised by the wind, so that a small portion of the lining, which was composed of silk of a light drab colour, became visible. Why

did he gaze with such riveted attention upon that little bit of silk? Did he think that he saw written upon it dark characters, which told something that seemed to make blacker than ever the mystery which surrounded that woman? A painful expression passed for a moment over his handsome features. An instant after, however, the capricious breeze replaced the cloak in its legitimate position, and the baronet averted his eyes from the form of Mrs. Grant, and tried to persuade himself that he might have been mistaken, and that he permitted exaggerated impressions to get too quickly the better of him.

Meanwhile, Nina reached the house. As soon as she gained the staircase that led up from the conservatory, where she knew no one could see her, her steps grew slow and languid; and when she found herself in her own room, she cast aside her bonnet and

cloak, and threw herself upon her bed, evidently overcome by weariness.

“All my life long to dread this discovery!” she murmured to herself three or four times over, in a monotonous, desponding tone, while an expression of dreary sadness rested upon her beautiful face, and then burst into a passionate flood of tears.

After indulging for a short time in this paroxysm of weeping, she rose, took from her breast a small medallion of the Virgin, which she always wore inside her dress, suspended by a chain from her neck, and, clasping it between her hands, prostrated herself upon the floor. For a little while she remained in that position, perfectly motionless, except when a convulsive sob shook her frame. Who can tell the wild storm of varied emotions that surged to and fro within that woman's heart? Repentance for the past, eager aspirations after better things, almost

fanatical enthusiasm for her Church, her love as a wife and as a mother, fears for the future—all these different passions were stirring there.

At length she raised herself, apparently calmed by prayer, took from a box on her dressing-table a small locket containing the miniatures of her husband and child, kissed them both fondly again and again, and then once more lay down to rest upon her bed, weariness apparently getting the better of everything else; and before long, forgetful of the morning hour, she fell asleep, holding still the pictures of those two loved ones in her hand.

For nearly an hour she slumbered tranquilly, until she was aroused by the shrill voice of the housemaid at her chamber door, informing her that it was eight o'clock. She started up, dizzy and confused. Almost immediately, however, recollecting herself, she

thanked the girl, and told her she might go away, as she did not require any further attendance. Nina was refreshed by her late sleep, brief though it was, but body and mind were, she felt, still somewhat unstrung. "I cannot appear at breakfast this morning," she thought to herself, as she pressed her hand to her forehead. "If I meet Edward Morden's eye again in the state I am now in, I shall be quite certain to betray myself. It was all I could do to preserve a decent composure while he looked at me in the garden. I must get an hour or two of repose before I am seen again in public.

With this intention, therefore, she rang the bell, and bade the handmaiden who answered the summons, tell Miss Morden, that as she felt very unwell from a bad headache, she hoped she would excuse her not appearing at breakfast that morning.

“Her headaches is just like the gents’ down at the Fox and Goose, they comes and goes at a moment’s notice,” observed the damsel who was charged with the message, and who was the same that had called Mrs. Grant, to another of her sisterhood whom she met in the passage. “Less than half an hour ago she was as lively as a sparrow among the currant bushes on a summer morning, and now the whim has taken her to be as die-a-way as a sick duckling.”

“There is always something queer about them furreigners,” replied the other; “I dare say she was brought up in some outlandish place. Very likely in the country, where, as I’ve heard tell, women burns themselves as soon as their husbands is dead. The silly benighted creatures! as if they ought not much rather to light a bonfire to show how glad they are to get rid of them. We can’t

wonder at the furreigners doing anything after that."

Having thus procured herself a short interval of solitude, Nina once more lay down upon her bed, knowing well that repose of body and mind was the chief thing she wanted. Physical rest she did indeed thus gain, but her thoughts were too busy to permit her much mental quiet. At length, when frequent steps in the passages and the noise of unclosing doors told her that every one was going down to breakfast, she rose, changed the dress she now wore for an elegant morning wrapper, removed as far as possible the traces of her late tears from her face, and arranged her hair. She feared a medical visit from Aunt Livie, who she knew well was certain sooner or later to come to her room with salvolatile in one hand and a pill-box in the other, and she felt that it would not do to appear before

her with all the traces of her past violent agitation visible in her appearance.

She had scarcely completed these arrangements when not Miss Morden but Louise entered the room. Nina started at the sight of her mother. Some strong emotion evidently stirred within her. A deep crimson dyed for a moment her cheeks, and then changed to ashy paleness, while she twisted nervously her black rosary around her fingers.

“My child, for heaven’s sake tell me what is the matter! Have you failed?—have you been discovered?” cried Louise, too much disturbed herself to observe at first her daughter’s agitation. “I was with Miss Morden when the servant brought the message about your having a headache. I knew well that was a mere excuse, and I have been dying with suspense ever since to know what has gone wrong. Tell me

directly what has happened, or that detestable old woman will be here with her prescriptions and physic bottles."

"You are mistaken, mother," replied Nina, doing her best to master her emotion. "I have been as successful as we could wish; and I am only keeping my room this morning because I feel a little out of sorts, after all the anxiety I have lately endured."

"Nina, you are not speaking the truth!" said Louise, who was now gazing at her with her piercing black eyes. "You have been weeping—you look as if you had been lately agitated. You are hiding something from me!"

"Hiding something from you, madre?—you who have known my every thought since I was a little child in your arms," rejoined the other, who had now recovered her self-possession, throwing her arms around her mother's neck in her prettiest and most

winning way. "Do you think I could do it if I were to try? What can make you fancy such a thing? What could I have to hide from you?"

In truth, Louise could not satisfactorily answer that last question; and her daughter's caresses, to the charm of which she was never insensible—for she had always a secret dread that Nina would forget her in the passionate love she bore her husband and child—reassured her.

"But why, then, have you been weeping? why did you look just now so disturbed?" she asked, still half doubting.

"You cannot wonder that I should look harassed just now; and then I am so sorry to bring evil to so noble a creature as Edward Morden."

This explanation relieved the mind of Louise, as it seemed to agree so well with Nina's character. She knew that her

daughter had been two or three times on the point of drawing back from her present undertaking, and she was not surprised to find her weeping over her victim. She therefore took leave of her, for she always feared exciting suspicion if she stayed long with her.

Nina heaved a sigh of relief when she was gone, and murmured to herself, "The worst is over, since I have met her eyes for the first time."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH thoughts every moment growing more uncomfortable and perplexed, Sir Edward, after Nina had left him in the garden, proceeded to Zitta's cottage. On reaching the door he entered without any ceremony, for the infirmity of the mistress of the place rendered the usual announcement of a knock useless, and he knew well that his visits were far too welcome to Zitta for her to regard such conduct as an intrusion. On glancing round the small apartment in which he now stood, he was surprised not to see the familiar form of the deaf and dumb woman seated in her accustomed place beside the hearth. Supposing, however, that she must be in a small

garden behind the house, where she spent much of her time in the cultivation of a few flowers, and of some vegetables which formed the chief part of her simple, foreign diet, he crossed the room and passed out through a door opposite to the one by which he had entered. The blushing carnations, with their shining coronets of morning dew and various gaily-tinted flowers, the broad-leaved lettuces, and other green plants, which the rain of last night had invested with a robe of fresher verdure than usual, all looked bright and trim enough to form the subject for a miniature picture of Dutch horticulture.

The little figure, however, which generally formed the centre of the scene, was not there. Sir Edward now began to think that Zitta must be ill, and with this idea he mounted to the bed-chamber above, which was the only other room in the small house.

There again he found nothing but solitude. The little white bed had evidently not been occupied last night, and the chamber contained no traces of Zitta's recent presence. All his experience of the habits of the deaf and dumb woman made him feel much astonished at this. He knew well that partly on account of the weariness which her weak little frame experienced after her long nightly rambles, partly from her dislike to meet the curious glances of the common people as they went out to their daily work, Zitta scarcely ever left the house in the morning.

Indeed, as has before been mentioned, she very seldom went out at all beyond her garden in the day-time. Meditating upon the matter, he descended again to the lower room, and stood there for a few minutes in much perplexity, listening to the purring of a large tortoise-shell cat, Zitta's only living com-

panion, who sat in the sunshine by the window, with half-closed eyes, lazily licking her paws after the fashion of the feline race in general, and to the ticking of a little white-faced clock that stood upon the chimney-piece, which two incessant monotonous sounds rather irritated his nerves, in his present state of doubt.

At length he came to the conclusion that the most probable explanation of the matter was, that Zitta had that morning for some reason departed from her usual custom and had gone out. He therefore determined that he would say nothing about her disappearance to any one until the afternoon, when he would re-visit the cottage and find, he hoped, Zitta within it. He could not, however, as he walked homeward, help feeling some uneasiness concerning her. The friendless, lonely creature, whose life he had saved, who looked solely to him for protec-

tion and sympathy, who had repaid the kindness with which he had treated her by such strong devotion, had interested very deeply his manly, yet tender heart, and he experienced considerable distress at the thought of any evil having happened to her.

Mrs. Grant did not come downstairs for upwards of an hour after breakfast. She then made her appearance, looking full as lovely as ever, for the paleness which still overspread her countenance, and the "languid light" that shone from her dark eyes, only added a softening charm to her beauty. Her face now made something the same impression upon you that does a glowing Italian landscape, when you look at it through a light veil of haze. Aunt Livie insisted upon her favourite remaining upon the sofa in the library, declaring quiet to be the best remedy for the nervous affection

under which she pronounced Mrs. Grant to be suffering. Nina did not object to this arrangement, for she still felt glad of repose and time for thought. She had not been long in the library, when a message was brought that one of Mrs. Grant's female servants, who had walked over from her house, which was about two miles distant, wished to see her mistress.

"Show the girl up here," said Miss Mor-den, who was sitting beside Nina. "Mrs. Grant can speak to her without having the trouble of moving, and there will be no one coming into the room just at present."

In a few minutes a neat, rosy-cheeked girl stood in the doorway, dropping a profuse number of curtsies, and staring at every object in the room in succession, as though she were determined to take away a photograph of each one of them stamped upon her mind.

"What's the matter, Mary Ann?" said her mistress languidly.

"Please ma'am, old Pedro is gone," replied the damsel, her eyes having now finally fixed themselves upon the magnificence of Aunt Livie's cap.

"Gone! what do you mean?"

"Why, ma'am, he did not come to breakfast this morning. And so when an hour or two were passed, Lucy and I began to think there must be something the matter with him, and we went to his room. But there was no Pedro to be seen. The window which opens level with the ground was thrown up, and we think he must have gone out that way. On the table there was a letter directed to you, ma'am, and so I walked over with it."

"I am not so much surprised at this," said Mrs. Grant quietly. "He was the most eccentric man I ever knew," she continued,

turning to Miss Morden. "I took him for a servant about a year ago in London, simply because he was my countryman, and seemed destitute, and the only recompense he made me was to be as troublesome to me as ever he could. Let us see what he says in his letter," and she unfolded the paper. "It is just what I expected from the queer tempered old man," she continued. "He says he supposes that the Senora, as she told him she wanted to get rid of him, will not be annoyed at his going away thus suddenly. Now, Mary Ann, you may go home;" and with another shower of curtsies, the girl left the room.

"My dear, we must all expect troubles of this sort," said Aunt Livie in a consolatory tone to Nina. "I've known much worse things happen than this. I remember once an instance of a small page not yet in his teens, who was such a favourite with his

mistress that she used to have him into the drawing-room every Sunday to say his Catechism, and she actually one day found him in the kitchen inciting the two servant-maids to fight for a bottle of the Champagne which she kept for her own especial drinking. She discovered afterwards that he had positively taken the feathers out of her bed and sold them to get pence to buy marbles with."

Sir Edward had happened to come into the library just as the foregoing conversation had commenced; and as he regarded with watchful attention everything that concerned Nina, he had remained in the room till it was ended, pretending to busy himself with the arrangement of some books. He could not, however, find much food for suspicion in what he heard. The conduct of Pedro in thus departing was, to say the truth, very singular, but he could not see

how Mrs. Grant was in any way connected with it. The whole of the strangeness of the proceeding lay with the servant; the behaviour of the mistress, when she was made aware of the circumstances, had nothing peculiar in it.

Very desirous to clear up his doubts, as to whether the amethyst that he had found in his room did really belong to Nina, Sir Edward called Sydney Ashton that day into his study, when he heard her go by, singing gaily as she went. She came willingly, pleased that he should want to have her with him; for of late, occupied as his thoughts had been with Nina, and the mystery that enveloped her, he had paid his cousin rather less attention than usual. Sydney had perceived this, and had attributed it to a growing partiality for Mrs. Grant, over which she had by turns wept in secret tears of grief and tears of indignation.

The softer part, therefore, of her nature was gratified when he called her to him ; but her pride was ready, nevertheless, at any slight cause, to take offence. Sir Edward, on his side, had never even dreamt of intentionally neglecting his cousin. Supposing that she placed the same tranquil confidence in his affection for her that he himself placed in hers for him, he had not the slightest idea that her trust in his love could be shaken by any little variation in the demonstrativeness of his manner towards her. His calm nature did not comprehend the fond doubts, the trembling jealousy of the female heart.

“ Sydney, my love,” he said, as she entered his study, “ can you tell me to which of your female friends this belongs ? ”

And as he spoke he held out towards her the amethyst.

“ How dare you ask me such a question ? ” she exclaimed, in sudden indignation, her

cheek glowing and her whole frame trembling.

“My dearest Sydney, what can you mean?” he replied, gazing at her in surprise.

“I mean,” she cried, scarcely able to restrain her tears, for the full tide of passion, which had been pent up within her for the last few days, was now breaking forth—“I mean that it is shameful in you to go on as you have been doing with that detestable, artful woman, ever since she came into the house, and that it is cruel and heartless of you to show me one of her ornaments in that mocking way.”

The true state of the case now began to dawn upon Sir Edward.

“My darling child,” he said, throwing his arm around her, and drawing her to him, “do you mean that you are actually jealous of Mrs. Grant? My poor little Sydney, with what an empty fancy you have been tormenting yourself.”

“How can you call it empty, after the way I see you look at her and talk to her.”

“Sydney,” he replied gravely, while he fixed upon her a look of calm reproach, “I love you as fondly and as singly as it is possible for woman to be loved. I scarcely should have thought you would have doubted it. But I have particular reasons, which I cannot at present make known to you, for wishing to observe Mrs. Grant both in her words and actions.”

Sydney's stubborn pride resented secretly what seemed to her the want of confidence in herself implied by his last words; and even yet she did not implicitly trust him. When, however, she gazed upon those dark brown eyes, in whose clear depths you read the truth of his spirit, even as beneath the crystal waves that surround some Northern isle you behold the firm rocks, whose bases are set a hundred fathoms below—when she

gazed upon those eyes, the yearnings of her woman's heart towards him overcame for awhile every other feeling, and she threw her arms around him, and felt with rapture his lips upon her brow, and forgot all besides in the one thought of her strong love.

“And now, Sydney,” he said, returning once more to the subject which had just before occupied him—“and now will you tell me if you are certain that this jewel belongs to Mrs. Grant?”

“Quite certain. She wore the brooch to which it belongs last night. I remember hearing Aunt Livie admire the way in which the stones are set.”

“Are you sure that no other lady in the house possesses a similar ornament?”

“I do not remember ever having seen any of them wear anything like it. But why do you want to know this?” she added, in evident wonder.

"I cannot answer you that question. You must be content, Sydney, to believe that I have some good reason for asking it. I must also beg you not to mention a word about my having asked you this to anyone. Will you comply with my request?"

She answered in the affirmative, and he knew well that he might trust her—she had none of the sieve-like propensities of some of her sex. In her heart, however, she was rather irritated with him for not more fully confiding in her. She was of course far from even dreaming of the real reason for her cousin's curiosity about Mrs. Grant, and there still lurked within her a half-suspicion, which she scarcely confessed even to herself, that he might not be dealing quite fairly with her.

Sir Edward was silent for a few minutes after this. There appeared no reason for doubting Sydney's testimony concerning the

jewel, and it therefore now seemed certain that Nina had been in his room last night while he slept. This conviction filled his mind once more with a thousand uneasy thoughts.

“Why, Edward, how dull and stupid you are. It makes me feel quite gloomy to be with you!” exclaimed his cousin, at length.

“God grant, Sydney, that I may never bring upon you any worse gloom than this,” he said, starting from his reverie, and pressing her to him in much emotion.

Then he turned away to the window, and began to talk about other subjects.

Not long after, Louise stole into the library for a moment, when Nina was alone there.

“What is this about old Pedro having run off in the middle of the night, which I hear talked of among the servants?” she asked

rather anxiously. "I suppose you have nothing to do with it. Is there any mystery underneath it?"

"None, except what is contained in the eccentricity of his strange old brain, I think," replied Nina quietly. "He has been pining for the South ever since he came to England. I suppose his real reason for going off thus secretly was because he thought I should wish to detain him."

"I thought he was so devoted to you, that he would be happy in any country with you."

"My attractions, I suppose, are not equal to those of a bull-fight, or to the delight of lying on a sunny slope among the orange gardens, smoking his cigarette."

"Well, his departure does not greatly matter. I do not see that you can now much require his services about anything, though in some cases he might have been

useful. He was so completely to be trusted. A purse of gold or a secret were equally safe with him. But I must say good-bye, again, my child, or we shall excite suspicion. I'm glad to have been made certain that there was nothing behind in the matter of old Pedro's disappearance;" and as she spoke she kissed her daughter affectionately, and left the room.

Nina threw herself wearily back upon the sofa when she had departed, and was soon sunk in deep thought.

CHAPTER XIV.

LATE that afternoon—for he was prevented by many trivial yet unavoidable hindrances, which it is unnecessary to specify, from going earlier—Sir Edward took his way once more towards Zitta's cottage. In mingled hope and fear he opened the door; but very soon his worst expectations were realised, for on looking round he perceived that the apartment was empty. Thinking, as he had thought in the morning, that there was some chance of her being in the garden or the bedroom, he again visited both, but, as on the former occasion, without any satisfactory result. The little dwelling was completely deserted.

On returning to the lower room after

this fruitless search, the first thing he noticed was the tortoise-shell cat, who, evidently much troubled by the prolonged absence of her mistress, wandered restlessly up and down, uttering now and then a disconsolate mew. Influenced by pity for the poor little animal, and by the thought of her of whom it had been so long the companion, he took the cat in his arms, and stroked gently her soft fur. There was something about Edward Morden that always made children and dumb creatures love to sit upon his knee and feel the touch of his hand, and listen to the sound of his voice—something which induced the weakest and most timid woman, when she looked into his face, unhesitatingly to confide in him.

The cat very soon began to purr complacently, and to rub her head against him; though Brownie, who, ever since he entered

the house had been with the utmost difficulty restrained from worrying her, thought it his duty to enter a protest against his master's regarding with favour any other animal save himself, by standing on his hind legs and growling most vindictively.

For some little time Sir Edward remained in that room meditating on the strange disappearance of its late occupant, and trying, with much anxiety, to imagine what had become of her. Two things only could have happened to Zitta. Either, seized by some eccentric fancy, she had chosen to become a wanderer, which seemed very improbable, for he fully believed that the mere strength of her attachment to himself would prevent her forming such a plan ; or else, last night, during her accustomed nocturnal ramble, some accident must have happened to her. He then began to think over all the possible casualties that might have befallen the deaf

and dumb woman. All at once a faint exclamation escaped him, as though some one had told him unexpected evil tidings.

Zitta was the only person who, besides himself, had had the slightest misgiving concerning Mrs. Grant's proceedings. Might not Nina have found out this and have resented it?—and was he not certain that last night, which he believed to be the season during which Zitta had disappeared, Mrs. Grant was absent from Llanmorden House?

Then he recalled the singular dream of last night concerning those two women, the glimpse which he had caught of the lining of the cloak, and also the manner of Zitta the last time he took leave of her in the moonlight, after his fruitless watching of Mrs. Grant in the park; and these recollections only added a shade more of mystery to the suspicions which began to fill his mind.

At length he came to the conclusion that

the first thing necessary to be done was to institute an inquiry among the neighbouring people as to whether any of them had seen Zitta last evening, and to have a general search made among the surrounding hills, and along the shore, for her body. There was a possibility of her having fallen down one of the precipices among the mountains, though he did not believe she wandered so far ; or she might have met with the same fate from the top of one of the cliffs.

He first proceeded to the rural policeman residing at Aberfinlin, and having explained to him the matter, gave into his charge the business of trying to find out whether any one among the inhabitants of the scattered houses of the neighbourhood had seen Zitta pass near them, and of searching beneath the precipices and cliffs to see if the deaf and dumb woman had there met with an untimely end. This functionary, who, in

that remote and tranquil district, found his duties usually limited to keeping the small boys in order in the village street, received the commission much as a hungry mastiff does a bone, and started upon the execution of it with an air of pride and importance, which reminded one strongly of that assumed by a gander the first time he takes his family for a walk through the poultry-yard. So much was the Baronet interested in the affair, that he took upon himself to make all inquiries in the village of Aberfinlin.

Miss Houder, who, doubtless, would have much delighted in having something to do in the matter, was gone to Kingowern, to attend the meeting of a society composed entirely of ladies, which assembled every month, to discuss, as its printed rules declare, all general subjects, from the planets down to the making of a pudding.

Considerable was the gossip and commo-

tion among the good people of Aberfinlin, when they heard that the strange, foreign woman, who had so long excited their curiosity, had so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. Two or three fishermen among them told Sir Edward that yesterday about noon they had seen Zitta at her window, as they returned from the little cove near her house where they moored their boats. He gained, also, later information of her from the little daughter of a woman who kept a cow. This child had been at Zitta's cottage at about seven o'clock on the previous evening, to deliver to her, as was her custom, a small quantity of milk, and the deaf and dumb woman had then appeared exactly as usual. Such were all the tidings Sir Edward had gleaned, when he returned to Llanmorden, more than half an hour late for dinner.

On entering the drawing-room, he ex-

plained to the assembled company the reason of his delay, and, as he did so, he cast a glance towards Mrs. Grant. But he could not see her face. As he entered the room, either by chance or intentionally, she had risen, and walked to the window, and she now stood with her back turned towards him. At dinner he once more tried the experiment of speaking in her hearing of Zitta's disappearance. This time he had a full view of her. Not a muscle of her countenance moved; but he thought he perceived that her fingers played rather nervously with her black rosary. Throughout the evening he found himself constantly trying with a kind of morbid curiosity to discover something of cruelty about that perfect mouth, or a gleam of latent ferocity in those lovely eyes. But that face still shone on in its beauty, the very model of all female charms and all female sweetness. Some-

times, as he looked at it, he felt inclined to accuse himself of flagrant injustice, and to fear that a vindictive feeling, arising from his knowledge that she was carrying on some design against himself, had something to do with his laying to her charge so terrible a crime. She may be guilty of subtilty and deceit, he thought to himself, but she cannot have done such a deed as this.

It was a dreary night that for Edward Morden, after he had retired to his own room. Two female faces were his incessant companions through those long hours of darkness. The one pale, rigid, and bloodless, with large mournful eyes, that told of a devotion to himself even unto death ; the other, glowing in all the brightness of life and beauty, but appearing now to his fancy animated by fiendish passions. When he tried to read, those faces came between his eyes and the page before him. When he

glanced around the room, they peeped out of dark corners at him. When, in order to try and free himself from them, he took a turn in the garden, they came athwart the silver moonbeams, or glared out from among the foliage of the trees, or were wafted past him by the midnight breeze, or peered at him over the garden fence. When he went back to his apartment, they were still there. When he lay down to rest, they looked through the bed-curtains at him. Though he closed his eyes, he felt that they were watching beside him ; and if he fell asleep for a moment, they were more distinct than ever in dreams. The wind (for it was a somewhat unquiet night) howled weird tales concerning those faces ; the trees in the garden murmured mysteriously about them ; the door creaked strange, inexplicable things touching the same subject ; the large drops of rain,

which, from time to time, when there was a storm outside, came pattering down the chimney upon the paper which filled the grate with a dull, dead sound, like that produced by the earth which is thrown on the lid of a coffin, uttered in each drop some terrible word, whose meaning he feared to interpret.

At length the dawn came—not arrayed in her rich robes of rose and gold, but “kerchiefed in a comely cloud,” and heralding her arrival by scattering before her a shower of rain-drops, that spread a bright carpet of green over the turf lately scorched by the summer heat, and made brighter the beds of flowers that adorned it like varied gems upon a velvet robe. But though misty and chill was the morning, Sir Edward was glad at its coming, for it dispersed, in a great measure, the gloomy and fantastic fancies of the past night, and

brought in their place more cheering ideas. One bright spot in the wide kingdom of thought it especially soothed him to dwell upon, as he lay awake before he arose, watching the clouds chase one another across the sky, and that bright spot was the remembrance of the way in which Sydney Ashton threw her arms around him yesterday.

About noon the policeman made his appearance at Llanmorden, and entered Sir Edward's study, into which he was ushered, that they might hold private communion together, with an air of solemnity that quite awoke within the Baronet the hope that he had made some important discovery. After, however, a most circuitous description (the long words strung together in which might have formed a watch-guard fit for Dr. Johnson himself) of the most minute circumstances, it became apparent that the result

of his efforts was simply nothing. He had made inquiries among the inhabitants of the outlying houses, but none of them had seen anyone pass answering the description of Zitta. He and a fellow-policeman had also been engaged since early morning in examining the most precipitous parts of the neighbouring mountains, as well as the sea-shore, but with no better success. Sir Edward, therefore, could only send him forth again to renew his investigations, and bid him promise a large reward to any one who could bring tidings of Zitta either alive or dead.

After this, three days, which were no very agreeable ones for Edward Morden, passed by, unmarked by anything especially worthy of note.

His horrible doubts as to whether Mrs. Grant was answerable for Zitta's disappearance still incessantly haunted him; and this

suspense, together with that he had now for several days experienced about Nina's designs against himself, could not fail to affect him both physically and mentally. He became nervous and absent, and even his manner and outward appearance were (as he found by the observations made upon them) slightly influenced by these feelings. Two or three times Sydney put to him saucy questions as to whether he had locked up his wits last night in his dressing-case, and forgotten to take them out in the morning, or whether his thoughts had travelled to Japan by the last cloud going that way? Aunt Livie told him he looked pale—that he was destroying his health by sitting up at night, and entreated him, by way of a curative, to drink a tumbler full of rum and milk every morning. His most intimate gentlemen friends rallied him about his low spirits, and expressed jocose hopes that he

would not run away the night before his wedding day.

All these remarks he took as good-humouredly as he could, though at times he was rather irritated by them. Every evening the policeman returned, to give an always lengthy but always unsatisfactory account of his researches.

Sir Edward now despaired of gaining any solution to the mystery from that quarter. It was, however, quite possible that, had poor Zitta fallen from the cliff, her body might have been washed away by the sea, or that even now it might be lying undiscovered somewhere amongst the mountains. Her fate, therefore, remained quite as uncertain as ever.

Throughout this time Mrs. Grant's manner was calm and composed, though certainly a little more silent and depressed than formerly. Sir Edward would often purposely

speak of Zitta's disappearance in her presence, and once or twice he fancied—but it might have been only fancy—that when he did so, he could detect a momentary quiver of her lip, an uneasy expression in her large black eyes. It also seemed to him that she avoided as much as possible being alone with him. But this idea might also have been merely the effect of imagination. He often felt a strong inclination to hint to her his suspicions concerning Zitta's fate, as he had done concerning her designs against himself.

This inclination grew every day stronger, and had she given him an opportunity of being alone with her he would probably have yielded to it. He was almost certain in that case that from her manner he could form some decided inference as to her guilt; but yet he shrank from breathing a word that might imply so terrible a suspicion.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was about a week before the day fixed for Sir Edward and Sydney's marriage. The weather had cleared again, and it was once more golden cloudless summer.

"How sick and tired I do feel of everything under the sun!" observed Lady Felicia that afternoon, as she reclined upon the sofa.

"And no wonder," rejoined Miss Houlder, who had known her ladyship intimately ever since she was a baby, and who, therefore, considered it her duty (as do most middle-aged lady friends, especially if they be unmarried, who have known us from our infancy), to administer to her now and then a little wholesome truth, by way of a kind

of mental tonic : " and no wonder, my dear, that you do feel in that way, when you do nothing all day but lie there and yawn. Just put on a stout pair of boots and a red petticoat, and walk with me three miles to see a young woman whom I'm going to lecture soundly upon wearing flowers in her bonnet, and I'm quite certain that by the time you come back again you'll find yourself changed."

"How completely you do away with all the sentiment of life," murmured Lady Felicia.

"It's not sentiment, my dear, that we want in life, but practical work. Now I call myself an active member of the community. There are fifteen useful societies that could not get on without me. And as for this parish, it would be in a wretched, drowsy state if I didn't keep every one going."

At this point the conversation between

the two ladies was interrupted by the entrance of Sir Edward into the drawing-room, where many of the company were assembled, with the proposition that, as it was such a splendid afternoon, some of the party should start on a riding expedition among the mountains.

All the young ladies agreed readily to this proposal, with the exception of Lady Felicia, who at first declared herself quite unequal to such an expedition. When, however, she heard that Captain Snoodle was to be of the party, she suddenly changed her tune, and went off with much alacrity to equip herself for the ride. The fact was, she knew that if she were not there the Captain would never leave the bridle-rein of her pretty cousin Lady Catherine, who was also staying in the house, and who shared with herself that gentleman's adoration. Therefore, though she was always in

considerable terror on horseback, and regarded as purgatory a shaking trot up and down the rough Welsh roads, she deemed it absolutely necessary not to allow her rival to get this advantage of her.

About an hour after a cavalcade of mounted ladies and gentlemen might have been seen ascending the steep road that leads from the valley of Llanmorden towards the hills. The ladies, with the exception of Lady Felicia, who rather reminded you, by the way in which she sat upon her horse, of a hen clinging to an unsteady perch upon a windy night, all seemed well-accustomed to their saddles, and their graceful figures arrayed in their close-fitting riding-habits, with the plumes of feathers which fluttered in their hats, carried you back, as you looked at them, in the midst of that picturesque landscape, to the old days of falconry, when noble dames and damsels

left the portals of yonder old gray castle upon the hill with a hooded castrel perched upon their wrist, to spend the long summer day, from rosy morning to evening grey, in sylvan sports and revelry among the green woods.

The equestrianism of many of the gentlemen could not be spoken of in equally laudatory terms. Some of them kept casting suspicious glances at the ears of their horses, anxious, apparently, to interpret the disposition of the animal from the various movements of those parts of his body; and others addressed their quadrupeds in menacing tones, as if they had been the worst disposed beasts upon earth. Two or three, however, of whom Sir Edward was one, shewed themselves more accomplished horsemen.

Miss Ashton and Mrs. Grant were both of the party. On horseback, Sydney had a decided advantage over Nina. The Spanish

lady, who had only been taught to ride within the last two or three years by her husband, could by no means emulate the graceful ease with which the English girl, accustomed from her youth to the saddle, sat her fiery little Arab.

At first Sydney rode beside her cousin; but when she saw that he was thoughtful and absent, and that he hardly answered (for he was meditating upon the mystery which now chiefly occupied him) the volley of lively questions which she showered upon him, she struck her horse impatiently with her riding-whip, and soon reached the side of another gentleman, who was riding somewhat in advance of the party. With this gentleman she commenced instantly a most animated conversation, though all the time she felt a strong inclination to begin to cry.

Sydney's mobile nature again cherished suspicion and mistrust of her cousin. She

was half inclined to believe that the pensiveness which had lately characterized his manner was connected with his partiality for Mrs. Grant; and she fancied that now his desire was to find himself alone with that lady. If such were Sir Edward's wish, it was soon destined to be realized.

The party had now arrived upon an eminence, which formed the commencement of a low range of hills, that lay between the higher mountains and the sea. The top of this hill presented a smooth green surface, which offered itself most invitingly for a canter, and the ladies, eager to avail themselves of it, set off at a rapid rate.

"Oh! dear me, this is really dreadfully dangerous!" cried Lady Felicia, grasping the pommel of the saddle, as the old black mare on which she was mounted first gave a slight caper, and then followed her companions. But the animal, who had been

long accustomed to terrified ladies, kept moving forward in her long, swinging canter, without paying any more regard to these exclamations than does a gallant ship, as she flies across the waves, to the cries of a sea-bird perched upon her mast. It happened that Sir Edward and Mrs. Grant were at the time a little behind the rest of the party, so that when these latter had reached the top of the hill, and had set off, as has been described, they had not completed the ascent.

Just when they arrived at the summit, and Nina was about to follow, Sir Edward perceived that her horse was lame. Anxious to discover what was the matter with the animal, he dismounted, and on examining its foot, perceived that a nail had run into the sole. With some little difficulty he managed to extract it, but it was impossible for the horse, thus injured, to proceed any

further. Neither would it be by any means safe for Mrs. Grant to ride him back down the rough path they had just ascended, which led to the valley below, and which they must of necessity follow if they returned homewards, as they were now almost forced to do. The only thing, therefore, that remained to be done, was for Sir Edward to place Mrs. Grant on his own horse, and to walk himself at her side, leading hers back to Llanmorden. Their companions had already, many of them, disappeared down the declivity at the other side of the hill, and though one or two of them chanced to look back, and saw that Mrs. Grant and the Baronet were standing still, they supposed that they were only stopping for some trifling reason, and they therefore proceeded onwards, without paying any further attention to them. Sir Edward now assisted Nina, who, since she

was thus thrown, as it were, into companionship with him, behaved towards him with all her most winning grace, to dismount; and while he was engaged in changing the saddles, she stood by, holding one of the horses.

A wide and varied prospect presented itself to their view from the spot on which they now stood. To the south, at their feet, lay the lovely little valley of Llanmorden—its rich green meadows, its trees, clothed in the bright foliage of summer, the stately mansion that stood at one end of it, all bathed by the sun in one flood of radiance, in whose light the little streamlet far below sparkled to the eye of fancy like the fiery girdle of some enchantress, who had dropped it as she sped through the air. To the north there stretched away in a long verdant line the range of hills, upon the commencement of which, as has been before

mentioned, they now found themselves. To the east rose the picturesquely-shaped summits of the higher mountains, with here and there the spray of some cataract, which dashed down their sides, just visible among them, as the sunbeams shone upon it, making it flash like a cascade of liquid diamonds. To the west was spread out the vast gently-heaving plain of ocean, bordered towards the land by what looked from this place like two narrow parallel lines, one of bright yellow sand, and the other of dark rock, reminding you of the two paths, one for good, the other for evil, which present themselves before man, and which lie so close together.

Towards this last named quarter Nina turned her gaze, and before long she became so absorbed in the contemplation of some object, or in the thoughts which that object called up, that she did not seem to

notice that the Baronet had finished his task of arranging the saddles, and was ready to proceed on their way homeward. On turning to her Sir Edward noticed how completely her attention was occupied, and curious to discover at what she was looking so fixedly, he followed with his own eyes the direction of hers. Very soon he perceived that they were riveted upon the little island of Saint Guire, which was distinctly visible from where they stood, as it rose up, with the ruined chapel that crowned its rocky summit from among the waves of the ocean.

Why, at that moment, did his strange dream on the night in which the mysterious hands appeared at the window suddenly return to his recollection? Why did the form of Zitta, as it had appeared to him in the vision pointing towards that very sea-girt rock to which Nina's eyes were now so

earnestly turned, rise up before him with such vivid distinctness? It was certainly a strange coincidence that the hand of the deaf and dumb woman in his dream, and the eyes of her who now stood beside him, should both be directed towards the same object. But was this merely a coincidence? Was there no darker meaning beneath it?

“Mrs. Grant,” he exclaimed, quickly “what is the mystery of St. Guire’s Isle? Why do you look at it as you are now doing?”

Scarcely had he uttered these words, when some violent inward agitation convulsed her beautiful face. She first became crimson, then deadly pale. Her limbs gave way, and she tottered backwards two or three steps, as if seeking for something against which she might support herself; but as there was nothing near her, she sank to the ground. Supposing that the effect which his words had

produced arose from the connexion which existed in her mind between St. Guire's Isle and the disappearance of Zitta, who had lived so near it, he exclaimed,

“God knows, Mrs. Grant, I should be unwilling to suppose you capable of compassing the death of a fellow-creature !”

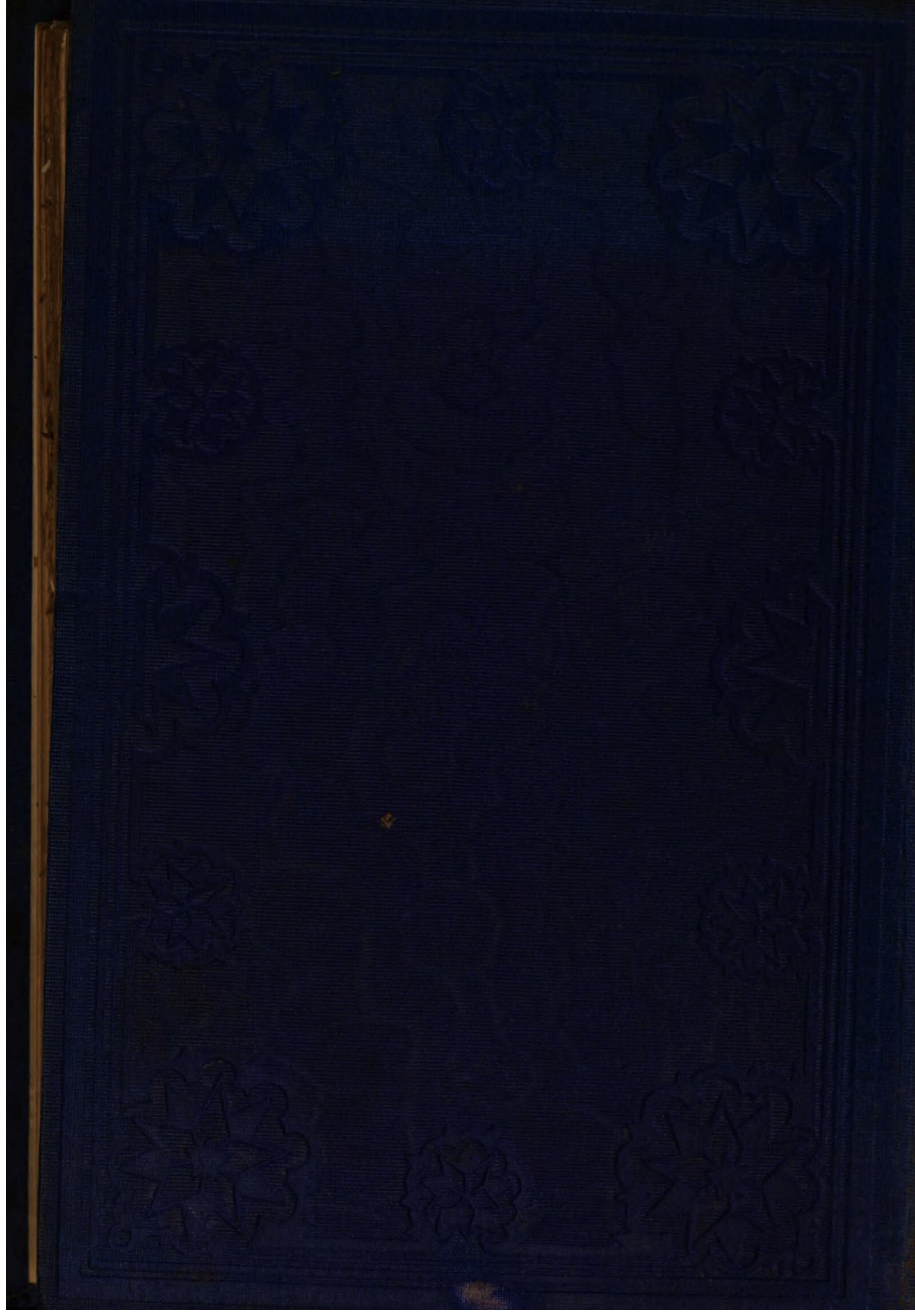
“The death of a fellow-creature !” she reiterated, starting up and gazing at him with a look of genuine surprise, that perplexed him, for he could hardly believe that she was practised actress enough to have assumed it in the midst of her present violent agitation.

“Sir Edward Morden,” she said, with more calmness than she had hitherto shown, “partly your own suspicious mind, and partly false appearances, have made you judge me hastily and wrongfully.”

Turning away from him, she approached the horse on which the side-saddle was

placed, and with some little difficulty mounted it without any assistance. He strove not to detain her, and very soon moving down the path which led back to the valley, she had placed a considerable distance between them.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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